

**The Theological Development
Of Helmut Richard Niebuhr
From 1920 to 1962**

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Theological Department

Dr. Helmut Richard Niebuhr

From 1920 to 1952

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Jerry M. O. K.

aus St. Marys/Ohio

Dekan: Prof.Dr.Dr.Rössler

Berichterstatter: Prof.Dr.Steinbach

Mitberichterstatter: Prof.Dr.Moltmann

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vocational adventures as journalist and teacher, Bushnell experienced a conversion in 1831, after which he went to Yale to begin study for the Congregational ministry. The leading

CHAPTER ONE: THE SOCIAL GOSPEL AS PRESUPPOSITION OF H. RICHARD NIEBUHR'S EARLIEST WRITINGS

along with the rest of the faculty, intended to remain true to

A. Theological Background: : Horace Bushnell and the Arisal of American Liberalism heritage but whose intention was under-

mined by a certain subtle change in emphasis which, pervading

Any discussion of the arisal and development of the the general intellectual environment, was also reflected in the American Social Gospel must take for its starting point the theological works of Taylor. Whereas the dynamic and integrating new theological situation which arose in America in the 1870's center of Edwards' theology was his all-consuming concern for as the result of the work and writing of Horace Bushnell, "Almighty God and Being as such", the key to Taylor's re-inter- variously described as the "American Schleiermacher" and the pretation of Edwards as his concern for man, his freedom, and "Father of American Liberalism."¹ Bushnell, rooted in the moral agency.³

church life of rural Connecticut with its strongly Edwardian

flavor,² was born in 1802 and died in 1876. After early embraced the new Newtonian physics, considering it a confirmation of the Calvinist belief in the absolute sovereignty of God over against the unit¹Sydney E. Ahlstrom, "Theology in America: A Historical Survey," in Smith and Jamison's Religion in American Life, I, p.280. 1730's. His support for the awakening rests in part upon his acceptan²Jonathan Edwards, (1703-1758), is considered by many to be the greatest American theologian. His efforts were devoted to a defense of classical Calvinism and his works constitute a massive apology for the FIVE POINTS of the Synod of Dort against what he considered the Armenianism of a number of his New England ministerial colleagues. His works, however, far from being mere repetitions of Calvin, are profoundly original, an originality, which derives from his attempt to integrate orthodox Calvinism into the Weltanschauung of Newtonian physics and Lockean³erry Miller, psychology and epistemology and, on the other hand, to interpret these important advances in physics and philosophy so as to harmonize them with the teachings of orthodox Calvinism. He the considered the attempts of the Armenians to derive from Newtonian physics a facile optimism and to extract from Lockean sensations of psychology a shallow rationalism to be superficial interpretations of Newton's Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica and Locke's Essay on the Human Understanding respectively. Discovering the latter work as a student at Yale in 1717, at the age of fourteen, Edwards, after reading it through felt profound joy, believing that he had found in it a support for the Calvinist belief in the

vocational adventures as journalist and teacher, Bushnell¹ experienced a conversion in 1831, after which he went to Yale to begin study for the Congregational ministry. The leading figure at Yale at this time was Nathaniel William Taylor who, along with the rest of the faculty, intended to remain true to the Edwardian theological heritage but whose intention was undermined by a certain subtle change in emphasis which, pervading the general intellectual environment, was also reflected in the theological works of Taylor. Whereas the dynamic and integrating center of Edwards' theology was his all-consuming concern for "Almighty God and Being as such", the key to Taylor's re-interpretation of Edwards is his concern for man, his freedom, and moral agency.³ For which his thought was formulated. According to

Ahlstrom, Bushnell was influenced philosophically by German bondage of the human will. Just as enthusiastically he embraced the new Newtonian physics, considering it a confirmation of the Calvinist belief in the absolute sovereignty of God over against the universe. Edwards was also the greatest apologist for the First Great Awakening which was in progress in New England in the 1730's. His support for the awakening rests in part upon his acceptance of Lockean sensationalism, particularly of the Lockean teaching that ideas originate in sensations and are not innate. He goes, indeed, a step further than Locke, denying objective correspondence not only to secondary but also to primary qualities, but this does not lead him to skepticism regarding the existing world, which he considers to be "a stable idea in the mind of God." Such skepticism, as well as the materialist-idealist controversy, is overcome for Edwards by the assertion that "existence... has no other meaning than the Divine Being Himself." cf. Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards*, New York, (1949) and his article in the *Nature Encyclopedia Americana*, IX, pp. 691-695, from which much of this note is taken. The standard editions of Edwards' works are the *Worcester*, (8 volumes), (1809), reprinted in four volumes in 1844 and the *Dwight*, (10 volumes), (1829). In addition there are many of Edwards' writings which have not yet been published.

³Ahlstrom, *op cit.*, p. 257.

¹Though Bushnell was a preacher and not a systematic theologian, his thought possessed a remarkable unity, as Ahlstrom, *op. cit.*, p. 281, points out.

in each Bushnell seems to have been influenced more negatively than positively by Taylor. Convinced by Taylor of the inadequacies of Edwardian theology, enthusiastic about Taylor's anthropocentric concerns, Bushnell was nevertheless not satisfied with the result of Taylor's re-interpretation. He preferred a more radical break with Edwards and developed Taylor's anthropocentrism to its logical conclusion, emphasizing human freedom and moral agency so strongly that all traces of divine determinism were eliminated. Thus he introduced into the American theological situation an intellectually respectable alternative to Edwardianism, an alternative which truly deserves the name "liberal." ³ This Bushnell's liberalism is further evidenced by the influences under which his thought was formulated. According to

Ahlstrom, Bushnell was influenced philosophically by German romantic idealism mediated through Coolidge. ⁴ One of his most Calvinistic circles before his time, Bushnell substituted the "moral important theological mentors was Schleiermacher. It is the influence which works to lift us up to the level of the super-Incarnation which stands at the center of Bushnell's theological system ⁵ and his understanding of the Incarnation is similar to Bushnell's first book was titled *Christian Nurture*, Schleiermacher's. It is its humanistic implications which win education cannot, however, be understood apart from their setting for the doctrine its central place in the theology of Bushnell.

Through the Incarnation divine-human intercourse is restored, the Christ in Theology, 1851; Sermons for the New Life, 1858; Nature natural is lifted to the level of the supernatural, human nature Victorious Sacrifice, 1866; Moral Uses of Dark Things, 1868; is supernaturalized and restored. Although this happened once and for all in Jesus Christ, nevertheless, it continues to happen

⁴Ibid., p. 280.

⁵Though Bushnell was a preacher and not a systematic theologian, his thought possessed a remarkable unity, as Ahlstrom, *op. cit.*, p. 281, points out.

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in each of us,⁶ particularly through Christian nurture.⁷ Such nurture should begin when a child is young, should not seek to awaken in him a conversion experience but rather assume that he is saved and attempt to deepen gradually his awareness of the meaning of human existence in the light of the redemption of humanity in Jesus. The issue of such nurture should be in the first place not so much knowledge as ethical action.⁸ Many attacks were launched against Bushnell's theology during his own lifetime, but most painful to him was the battle between him and fellow Congregationalist ministers who began procedures aimed at bringing Bushnell to trial for heresy. This threat was avoided only by the withdrawal of Bushnell's North Church from the Association of Congregational Churches of America,

⁶That is the meaning of the atonement in Bushnell's theology. For the forensic understanding of atonement current in Calvinistic circles before his time, Bushnell substituted the "moral influence theory" according to which the Incarnation is an influence which works to lift us up to the level of the supernatural. This "moral influence theory" of the atonement was the most attacked of Bushnell's theological formulations.

⁷Bushnell's first book was titled Christian Nurture, published in 1847. The views expressed in it on Christian education cannot, however, be understood apart from their setting in his total theological system.

⁸Other writings by Bushnell include God in Christ, 1847; Christ in Theology, 1851; Sermons for the New Life, 1858; Nature and the Supernatural, 1858; The Character of Jesus, 1861; The Victorious Sacrifice, 1866; Moral Uses of Dark Things, 1868; Forgiveness and Law, 1874. The authoritative biography of Bushnell is T.T. Munger's Horace Bushnell, Preacher and Theologian, Boston, 1899.

⁹This phrase was coined by Parrington who is quoted by Carter. Cf. Paul A. Carter, The Decline and Revival of the Social Gospel, Ithaca, New York (1954), p. 9.

In spite of these attacks, however, Bushnell's influence continued to grow. This theological system, centered in a liberal Christology, corresponded more closely to the mood of the closing decades of the nineteenth century than the more austere and theocratic Calvinism of Edwards, Hodge, and Taylor. Emphasis on the immanence of God in Christ, the perfectability of human nature, and the importance of education and the right moral action introduced into the main stream of American theology by Bushnell became generally accepted in many theological circles in the Seventies and Eighties, and by the close of the century were dominant on the theological scene, a dominance which they held down to the outbreak of World War I--and, indeed, into the 1920's. The men of the Social Gospel, from Gladden to Rauschenbusch and Matthews, continued true to this liberal position in spite of the various modifications which were necessary in the face of the changing circumstances in the years from 1870 to 1920, and the direct relationship between Bushnell and these Social Gospelers is not hard to discover.

B. Sociological Background: The Age of "The Great Barbecue"⁹

The decade following the Civil War, which ushered in the Gilded Age of American Capitalism, was characterized by rapid industrialization, urbanization, and the sociological upheaval which accompanies these phenomena. This was the age of the

⁹This phrase was coined by Parrington who is quoted by Carter. Cf. Paul A. Carter, The Decline and Revival of the Social Gospel, Ithaca, New York (1954), p. 9.

great capitalists, popularly dubbed "Robber Barrens," who, since neither government nor labor had been able to keep abreast of the rapid sociological changes in American life, which the Civil War had occasioned, had almost complete freedom to amass their great fortunes by whatever exploitive means they chose. and The result was perpetual unemployment, poverty, a twelve-hourly seven-day work week, child labor, growth of slums, disease, prostitution, and many other social evils. Movements for the

reform of prisons and hospitals and for women suffrage also arose

C. The Social Response: Movements for Reform

By the seventies many segments of American society had begun to awaken to the situation and to work for reform and

redress of injuries, which were too many to count. Labor organized itself in 1869 under the leadership of Uriah S. Stephens into "The Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor," popularly known as "The KOL."¹⁰

Discerned. There is first the protest of social (Out of Samuel Gompers's attempt to organize cigar workers in the 1870's there emerged in 1881 the Federation of Organized Trade and Labor Unions of the United States of America and Canada.¹¹

be changed only through the effect of redeemed individuals and by

¹⁰The full name was not adopted until 1871. The Knights of Labor grew slowly until 1877 when, as a result of successful strikes, the membership leaped forward reaching the height of its popularity in the 1880's--700,000. After 1886, membership declined rapidly as the result of several factors, and although the Order continued well into the twentieth century, it had lost its significance by 1893.

individual.¹² Opposite to this conservative solution to the social

¹¹This Union was re-organized in 1886 as the American Federation of Labor and continues to hold a virtual monopoly of the Labor Movement in America until the present day. The sermons of Henry Ward Beecher who, though active in the anti-slavery fight prior to the Civil War, settled down to a somewhat mild, middle-class complacency in his Plymouth Church in Brooklyn after 1865. His

Various farmers' organizations, known as "granges" and either in
 agitating against railway monopolies and discriminations, began
 to appear after 1872. Around the same time, the Prohibitionist¹³
 party was organized to protest the excesses of alcoholism, a
 protest which originally was based not so much upon a narrow and
 legalistic anti-alcoholism as upon a broader social sensitivity¹³
 which saw the way in which the alcohol industry was exploiting
 underfed, underpaid, and fatigued workers. Movements for the
 reform of prisons and hospitals and for woman suffrage also arose
 in this period. The result is the Social Gospel.¹⁴

II. The Religious Response: Individual Conversion Versus Social Reform

1. Washington Gladden

Many within the Church also saw the excesses of "The Great
 Generally designated "Father of the Social Gospel,"¹⁵
 Barbecue" and sought to respond to them from the standpoint of the

gospel. Within the general response of the Church three different
 as pastor of Plymouth Church. Later, after the turn of the century
 orientations can be discerned. There is first the protest of
 this conservative response was carried on by the Fundamentalists.
 social (but not always theological) conservatives, formulated in
 terms of extreme individualism. Salvation is for the individual
 and is achieved through repentance and inner renewal. Society can
 be changed only through the effect of redeemed individuals and by
 acts of charity and alms-giving. The Church's mission in an

industrialized society is the same as in any other society--to
 preach repentance and conversion to the will of God to the
 individual.¹² Opposite to this conservative solution to the social

12 An example of this conservative response is the sermons
 of Henry Ward Beecher who, though active in the anti-slavery fight
 prior to the Civil War, settled down to a somewhat mild, middle-class
 complacency in his Plymouth Church in Brooklyn after 1865. His

¹⁵ Handy, The Social Gospel in America, New York (1966) p. 32.

evils is that of the radical left which is formulated either in terms of a thoroughly re-interpreted Christianity or a secularized humanism which maintains only a formal connection with Christianity.¹³

The third and mediative response is the one which directly falls within the confine of this paper and is also the one which was most widespread and influential. Its theological basis is the Incarnational Christocentric liberalism of Bushnell. Its originality consists in its attempt to apply this Bushnellian theology to the sociological problems of the Gilded Age with the help of the insights of sociology and economics. The result is the Social Gospel.¹⁴

most important influences on Gladden during his years at Williams
E. The Social Gospel Proper: 1876-1918

was John Hanson, a man of somewhat unorthodox religious views and
1. Washington Gladden

an intense interest in political science and ethics, who later
Generally designated "Father of the Social Gospel,"¹⁵
played a role in the Social Gospel Movement.

writings consist mostly of sermons preached during his forty years as pastor of Plymouth Church. Later, after the turn of the century and in conscious opposition to the liberal Left Wing movements, this conservative response was carried on by the Fundamentalists.

¹³acquaintance with Bushnell was through a volume of sermons, which George D. Herron, whose radicalism finally led him to a complete break with the Church and, indeed, with his own wife, declaring as he did, the marriage vow to be a sin against freedom, is an example of this humanist response; Henry George is an example of the response in terms of a radical socialistic re-interpretation of Christianity. Cf. Charles Howard Hopkins, The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Christianity, 1865-1915, New Haven and Oxford (1940).

of an integral theology. It was particularly Bushnell's view of
¹⁴The name "Social Gospel" does not appear until after 1900 and was apparently coined by a group of Calvinists seeking to establish a communistic community in Georgia. The Reality, which after 1900 is denoted by the term "Social Gospel," arose in the 1870's, however, and in those early years was called "Social Christianity." Cf. Hopkins, op cit., pp. 11-52. According to Smith and Jamison, Religion in American Life, IV, p. 694, certain pre-Civil War influences which contributed to the arisal of the Social Gospel are not adequately discussed by Hopkins. Nevertheless, most treatments of the Social Gospel begin with the seventies, since to apply the term to pre-Civil War movements must appear to be somewhat anachronistic.

¹⁵Handy, The Social Gospel in America, New York (1966) p. 32.

Washington Gladden was born in Pittsgrove, Pennsylvania in 1836. At the age of sixteen, after an education limited mostly to the winter terms in the local school because of farm work, Gladden was apprenticed to a printer in Owego, New York, near his uncle's farm on which he had grown up. After a conversion experience in 1853 during a revival preached by Jedediah Burchard, an associate of Charles Finney, Gladden was won back to the church which he had left when he left home. A year later he resolved to enter the Congregational ministry. After a year and a half of study at Owego Academy, he entered Williams College in 1856. One of the most important influences on Gladden during his years at Williams was John Bascom, a man of somewhat unorthodox religious views and an intense interest in political science and ethics, who later played a role in the Social Gospel Movement. ¹⁵ Ordained in 1860, Gladden discovered Bushnell's theology while in his second parish at Morrisania, New York. His first acquaintance with Bushnell was through a volume of sermons, which ²¹ led him to read Bushnell's God in Christ. ¹⁶ In the three discourses ¹⁸ which make up this book Gladden says he found "an emancipation ¹⁹ supporter of the 'new theology' and in the strifes waging around proclamation which delivered me at once and forever from the bondage of an immoral theology." ¹⁷ It was particularly Bushnell's view of the atonement as Christ's work to renovate man's character and ¹⁹ service of installation. ²⁰ Gladden was called to North Adams in 1866 while Bushnell restore him to fellowship with God which appealed to Gladden and ²⁰ which provided him with a basis on which to meet the challenges ²¹ controlled the politics of New York City.

¹⁶ Horace Bushnell, God in Christ, Hartford, 1849. ¹⁷ Washington Gladden, Recollections, p. 119. it "a book which became one of the first mileposts set by American Social Christianity." ¹⁸ op. cit., p. 27.

which were soon to confront him.¹⁸

In his third parish, in North Adams, Massachusetts, Gladden became acquainted with the labor-capital struggle and developed a hearty interest in this problem which he was to retain for the rest of his life and to which he was to give a great deal of his energy.¹⁹ After a four year interruption in his parish ministry during which time he edited the periodical The Independent,²⁰ Gladden was called to the pulpit of North Congregational Church in Springfield, Massachusetts. The labor-capital problem in this city of 30,000 was very acute when Gladden went there in 1875, a long depression having followed the panic of 1873, and Gladden, whose interest in this area was known, was invited on a certain Sunday night to address a group of unemployed workers, promising to address the employers on the following Sunday evening. Thus began a series of lectures delivered in his church in Springfield each Sunday evening, and published in 1876 as Working People and Their Employers.²¹

¹⁸In addition to his work for the spread of the Social Gospel, Gladden was from the time of his discovery of Bushnell an enthusiastic supporter of the "new theology" and in the strifes waging around Bushnell he took a vigorous part, defending Bushnell with pen and tongue. cf. Handy, op. cit., p. 23f.

¹⁹Gladden was called to North Adams in 1866 while Bushnell was still alive and invited him to preach the sermon at his service of installation. Handy, p. 22.

²⁰During these years also Gladden continued his crusade for social reform, vigorously attacking the Tweed ring which then controlled the politics of New York City.

²¹Washington Gladden, Working People and Their Employers, Boston, (1876). The publication of this book marks a definite stage in the progress of the Social Gospel. Hopkins calls it "a book which became one of the first mileposts set by American Social Christianity." op. cit., p. 27.

This book was the beginning of a long writing career in the course of which Gladden produced his more than thirty books.²² Most of these were written during his long pastorate of First Congregational Church of Columbus, Ohio (1882-1914) and combined apologetic for the "liberal theology" with a prophetic cry for social reform--two aspects of his work which for him were always inextricably intertwined. It is his call to social reform, however, which is of primary interest in this paper and for which he is most famous.

In his Applied Christianity²³ Gladden asserted that Jesus' teachings contained the fundamental principles for a sound social order and that the application of these principles to the problems of industrialization would solve the problems. In his two series of Beecher lectures²⁴ he offered a more detailed formulation of his ideas for the solution of the basic problems confronting turn-of-the-century society. Though not a Socialist, he, nevertheless, believed that many industries should be managed co-operatively with all the people--workers and managers--

²²For a bibliography containing a more complete list of Gladden's works, cf. Encyclopedia Americana, XII, p. 677.

²³Washington Gladden, Applied Christianity: Moral Aspects of Social Questions, Boston (1886).

²⁴Published as Tools and the Man: Property and Industry Under the Christian Law, Boston (1893); Social Fads and Forces: The Factory, The Labor Union, The Corporation, The Railway, The City, The Church, New York (1897); Social Salvation, Boston (1902); Christianity and Socialism, New York (1905); The Church and Modern Life, and The Labor Question, Boston (1911).

²⁵The Forks of the Road, New York (1916), pp. 123-247.

²⁶Cf. his article, "The Negro Crisis: Is the Separation of the Two Races to Become Necessary?", The American Magazine, LXIII (November, 1906-April, 1907), pp. 236-301.

uniting to furnish the capital and direct the work. Among such industries he named railways, telegraphs, mines, and public service industries of the cities. Like the other men of the Social Gospel, Gladden devoted the greater part of his energies to a discussion of the right ordering of the labor-capitalist relationship. Nevertheless, he occasionally discussed other problems facing his age. Particularly toward the end of his life, when the situation between labor and capital had improved somewhat, he devoted attention to the problems of racism and nationalism, both of which he felt conflicted with the principles contained in the teachings of Jesus. "If anything is central in Christianity," he said in 1916, "it is this obliteration of lines of divisions between races and nationalities and the inclusion of the world in one brotherhood."²⁵ Nor did he express his concern only in vague generalities about the evils of racism, but took specific stands in which he called attention to the plight of the American Negro. He sincerely believed that white and Negro should and could live peacefully together.²⁶ At the end of his life, as war raged in Europe, he was calling for the creation of a League of Peace with an international police force able to make its policies effective.

2. Gladden's Disciples

Around Gladden there gathered a large number of men, inspired by the same liberal theology as he, concerned about the practical implications of this theology for the social problems

²⁵The Forks of the Road, New York (1916), pp. 123-247.

²⁶Cf. his article, "The Negro Crisis: Is the Separation of the Two Races to Become Necessary?", The American Magazine, LXIII (November, 1906-April, 1907), pp. 296-301.

created by the rapid industrialization of post-Civil War America, and eager to make use of the new sciences of sociology and economics in order to solve these problems in the way which their understanding of Christianity indicated they should be solved. Most of these men were fifteen to thirty years younger than Gladden and did not achieve the stature of the master, though they were filled with the same sincere zeal for the cause.²⁷

It is impossible to discuss the achievements of each of these disciples individually, yet they must be named, and the work which they did briefly identified. There was W.D.P. Bliss, an Episcopalian priest, 1856-1926, who, converted to the cause of labor by Henry George, organized the Society of Christian Socialists in Boston in 1889. William S. Rainsford, an Anglo-American Protestant Episcopal priest, born in Dublin, Ireland in 1850 emigrated to America in 1876. He served as rector of St. George, a fashionable Episcopal Church in New York City, from 1882 to 1906, and organized there a settlement house for the poor, and work of J.F.D. Maurice, (1825-1897), which led to the movement of Scottish theologian and social reformer; Charles Kingsley, 1819-1875, not without a struggle with the congregation, who, nevertheless, Maurice's Christian Socialism movement and wrote novels sympathetic yielded to the authority of the priestly office.²⁸ Rainsford was of the book, *Ecce Homo: A Survey of the Life and Work of Jesus Christ*, a vigorous supporter of and contributor to the Social Gospel movement, and was an acquaintance of Gladden. T.T. Munger, 1830-1910, a close friend and contemporary of Washington Gladden who, like Gladden, was a strong champion of Bushnell's theology, was

²⁷Charles N. Sheldon, *In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do?*, (1897).
²⁷For a commentary on Gladden's pioneering role in the Social Gospel cf. Handy, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

²⁸It is through the Episcopal tradition represented by Rainsford, Bliss, and others that the English influence entered the American Social Gospel. This influence included the writings

also a partisan of the Social Gospel.²⁹ Then there were the authors of the many Social Gospel novels. Gladden himself had established the "Gattung" for this type of literature when, in response to a request by Roswell Smith that he write a story for The Century Magazine about some people in a New England town who united to realize a practical Christianity, he wrote The Christian League of Connecticut.³⁰ Soon a flood of similar writing appeared in support of the Social Gospel. Contributors were Edward E. Hale, Katherine P. Woods, Albion W. Tourgee, Florence Converse, Vida Scudder, and Susan Glaspell. By far the most successful, however, were the novels of Charles M. Sheldon, the most popular of which, In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do? had sold 100,000 copies a few months after its publication in 1897.³¹ Finally, the eminent American economist, Richard T. Ely, must be mentioned. Recipient of a fellowship in letters at his graduation

and work of J.F.D. Maurice, (1805-1872), which led to the movement of Christian Socialism in England. Thomas Chalmers, 1780-1847, a Scottish theologian and social reformer; Charles Kingsley, 1819-1875, English Priest and chaplain to Queen Victoria, who was active in Maurice's Christian Socialism movement and wrote novels sympathetic to the workers, and John R. Seeley, British historian and author of the book, Ecce Homo: A Survey of the Life and Work of Jesus Christ, Boston, (1865). Seeley was one of the humanitarian reformers but his work was widely read in the Social Gospel circles.

²⁹ Munger was Bushnell's biographer. Cf. note 8 above.

³⁰ Vide Richard T. Ely, Social Aspects of Christianity and

³¹ Washington Gladden, The Christian League of Connecticut, New York, (1883). Gospel in America, includes sixty-six pages from Ely's writings. Cf. Hancy, op. cit., pp. 184-250.

³² Charles M. Sheldon, In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do?, (1897). By 1933, this book had been translated into twenty-one languages and had sold 23,000,000 copies. The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Christianity 1865-1915, New Haven and Oxford (1940).

from Columbia College in 1876, Ely went to Germany for graduate study in philosophy. He began his study at Halle but soon decided to switch his field to economics and political science and to transfer to Heidelberg. There, in 1878, he met Karl Knies, one of the founders of the historical school of economic thought, who became the director of his studies during the remainder of his time in Germany and whom he was always proud to name his mentor. In 1879, he received his Ph.D. at Heidelberg summa cum laude and after a year of further study and private teaching in Berlin, he returned to America to begin his teaching career at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. In addition to his sharp attack on classical economy,³² which furnished the Social Gospelers with a body of economic theory for their attack on capitalism, Ely himself was a dedicated Christian layman who contributed directly to the Social Gospel Movement.³³

There are very many more men who contributed directly or indirectly to the Social Gospel,³⁴ but this account must conclude with a brief discussion of the man whose name is most universally associated with that movement and whom Reinhold Niebuhr has named

³²Cf. Richard T. Ely, The Past and the Present of Political Economy, (1884).

³³Vide Richard T. Ely, Social Aspects of Christianity and Other Essays, New York (1889). Handy, in his collection of documents from the Social Gospel in America, includes sixty-six pages from Ely's writings. Cf. Handy, op. cit., pp. 184-250.

³⁴The most exhaustive account of the Social Gospel Movement is Charles Howard Hopkins' now classical, The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Christianity 1865-1915, New Haven and Oxford (1940).

"not only the real founder of Social Christianity in America but also its most brilliant and generally satisfying exponent to the present day."³⁵

Walter Rauschenbusch

Gaius G. Atkins in his study of American religion from 1892 to 1932 concurs in this high estimate of Rauschenbusch, stating that "two men did more between them to direct the mind of the churches toward the social problems than any of their contemporaries."³⁶ These two men are Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch, and to them belongs a place apart. Just as the publication of Gladden's Working People and Their Employers³⁷ was the first milestone set by the Social Gospel, so Rauschenbusch's last book, A Theology for the Social Gospel,³⁸ was one of the last, and is generally taken as the high water mark of American Social Christianity. After Rauschenbusch's death in 1918, Social Christianity began a decline which was hastened by the crisis in America in the late twenties of a new and powerful theological movement. Nor did any more the

German Baptist congregation in Rochester and went again that

³⁵Reinhold Niebuhr in Preface to Interpretation of Christian Ethics, New York (1935) p. 1. That Rauschenbusch was the founder of Social Christianity in America can scarcely be maintained in the light of Hopkins' study, but a case could be made for him as its most brilliant and generally satisfying exponent. Cf. Henry F. May's discussion in Protestant Churches in Industrial America, New York, (1949).

³⁶Gaius G. Atkins, Religion in Our Times, New York, (1932), pp. 46-47, quoted in Handy, op. cit., p. 15. the University of

³⁷Washington Gladden, Working People and Their Employers

³⁸Walter Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, New York, (1917). Though Rauschenbusch was twenty-five years Gladden's junior, they both died in the same war year of 1918; Gladden at eighty-two and Rauschenbusch at fifty-seven. on New York's west side near the depressed area known as "Hell's

defenders of this cause with the stature and vigor of a Rauschenbusch or a Gladden appear.

previous education in Germany or America.

9.3. Walter Rauschenbusch

Walter Rauschenbusch was born in Rochester, New York on October 4, 1861, son of Karl August Rauschenbusch, who in 1846 had come to America from Germany as a Lutheran missionary. Soon after arrival, however, Karl was himself converted by Baptist missionaries and joined the German Baptist Church. In 1858, Rochester Theological Seminary decided to begin a German department to train men for the growing number of German Baptist congregations and named Karl August Rauschenbusch to head this new department. Here Walter was born in 1861.

Walter's own early education was in Germany where he lived in the later 1860's. Returning to Rochester around 1870,

he continued his study in America for ten years. In 1879, in

³⁹See Ahlstrom, *op. cit.*, p. 295.

response to a conversion experience, he was baptized into the German Baptist congregation in Rochester and went again that same year to Germany where he studied for four years at the Gymnasium at Guetersloh, graduating in 1883 with first honors in classics. After further travels in Germany and a brief period of study at Berlin, Rauschenbusch decided to enter the ministry and returned to America to begin his study at the University of Rochester and Rochester Theological Seminary. After graduating in 1886 from Rochester Theological Seminary, he was assigned to the Second German Baptist Church of New York on West 45th Street on New York's west side near the depressed area known as "Hell's

Kitchen." Here began a number of experiences which are as significant for his later theological development as his previous education in Germany or America.³⁹

Two experiences were of especial significance. In the first place, the young Rauschenbusch, schooled in the traditions of individualistic conservatism, was confronted at Second German Baptist with the intense poverty of his immediate surroundings and of his own parishioners. This aroused in him profound compassion and caused him to plunge into the study of economics and sociology, as well as into practical work for the reform of society's evils which were inflicting such suffering on his flock and on a large part of the populace of the city in which he was working and living.

Secondly, 1886 was the year of his confrontation with Henry George who ran in that year for mayor of New York.⁴⁰

Social Gospel, For the Right.

³⁹See Ahlstrom, *op. cit.*, p. 295.

⁴⁰In addition to this social work, Rauschenbusch's Henry George, (1839-1897) had himself experienced poverty first hand. After dropping out of school at an early age, he worked at many jobs. Walking the streets of New York at the age of thirty, he was overcome with shock at the great disparity between rich and poor and decided to dedicate himself to a career of reform. He worked out his own philosophy which proclaimed the necessity of economic, as well as legal, equality. His method for arriving at this economy was the "single tax" which he urged the state to impose upon landowners and by means of which the state was to appropriate the unearned increment in the value of land. George made the "single tax" into a national issue through his book, *Progress and Poverty*, New York, (1879), which became a best seller. George's collected works have been published in ten volumes, *The Collected Works of Henry George*, New York, (1904). His son, Henry George, Jr., (1862-1916), who became a congressman from New York's seventeenth and then New York's twenty-first district, continued George's work and published a biography of his father in 1900, *Life of Henry George*. Rochester Theological Seminary Bulletin (November, 1918), pp. 51-52.

Rauschenbusch with his new sensitivity to the social ill⁴³ around him became an enthusiastic supporter of George, taking an active part in the campaign. Indeed, it is to this confrontation with George that Rauschenbusch later attributes that personal social awakening which led him into the active fight against capitalistic abuses.⁴¹ This new work caused him much personal anguish, however, since he had to "set myself against all that I had previously been taught."⁴² Nor did many of his friends approve of his social concerns and actions. They urged him to give up his social work for "Christian work." Nevertheless, in spite of inner and outer challenges, Rauschenbusch remained convinced that his new work was Christ's work and continued along the same line of march. From 1889 to 1891 he edited, along with Leighton Williams and Elisha Post, the pioneer paper for the Social Gospel, For the Right.⁴⁵

In addition to this social work, Rauschenbusch's religious needs and the challenges of his friends compelled him to turn back to the Bible which he began to study intensively

⁴¹"I owe my first awakening to the world of social problems to the agitation of Henry George in 1886 and wish therefore to record my lifelong debt to this single-minded apostle of a great truth." Rauschenbusch, Christianizing the Social Order, New York, (1912), p. 394. George played an important catalytic role in the Social Gospel. It is he who was also responsible for the conversion of W.F.D. Bliss to the cause of labor and is thus the indirect inspiration behind Bliss's founding of the Society of Christian Socialists.

⁴²Walter Rauschenbusch, "The Genesis of Christianity Crisis, and the Social Aim," Rochester Theological Seminary Bulletin, (November, 1918), pp. 51-52.

⁴⁵In those years the home of the Webbs was the gathering place for many Left Wing, socialistically oriented intellectuals.

with the hope of finding in it a basis for the Social Gospel.⁴³

It is at this point in 1891 that Rauschenbusch, victim of his deafness as a result of leaving a sickbed too soon, took leave of his congregation and returned to Europe for a year to study social movements in England and the New Testament in Germany. The experiences of this year provided Rauschenbusch with the materials for the construction of that synthesis which appeared in his mature work of which Christianity and the Social Crisis, Christianizing the Social Order, and A Theology for the Social Gospel⁴⁴ are the best examples. Upon these writings is based his reputation as "the most brilliant and generally satisfying representative" of the Social Gospel.⁴⁵ His life was

given. While in England, Rauschenbusch became acquainted with Sidney and Beatrice Webb, the leaders, along with George Bernard Shaw, of Fabian socialism. He spent some time in their home at 41 Grosvenor Road.⁴⁵ If he had not previously been a socialist, he became one now and integrated the socialist critique in its

non-Marxian form (though obviously heavily influenced by insights from Marx)⁴⁶ into his formulation of the Social Gospel. The Kingdom of God became for Rauschenbusch similar to, but not identical with, the socialists' utopia dreamed of by the Fabians of the labor movement. ibid., pp. 406-409. Of course, such opinions were quite acceptable in America before October, 1917. The first, and perhaps

⁴³"I had to go back to the Bible to find out whether I or my friends were right. I had to revise my whole study of the Bible. All of my scientific studying of the Bible was deported undertaken to find a basis for the Christian teaching of the Social Gospel." Ibid. did not have to experience this or, indeed, the entire fiasco of the "return to normalcy," which would have broken

⁴⁴Walter Rauschenbusch, Christianity and the Social Crisis, New York, (1907); Christianizing the Social Order, New York, (1912); A Theology for the Social Gospel, New York, (1917).

⁴⁵Walter Rauschenbusch, Christianizing the Social Order, p. 93.

⁴⁶In those years the home of the Webbs was the gathering place for many Left Wing, socialistically oriented intellectuals.

and other evolutionary socialists.⁴⁶

In Germany his study of the New Testament enabled him to discover in the Bible that for which he had been searching since the years immediately following 1886--"A basis for the Christian teaching of the Social Gospel." This basis, he was convinced, was the doctrine of the Kingdom of God as it was preached by Jesus. This discovery, which he himself says occurred in 1891, occasioned a great change in him. Describing this change, Rauschenbusch says, "... Christ's conception of the Kingdom of God came to me as a new revelation. Here was the idea and purpose that had dominated the mind of the Master himself. All his teachings center about it. His life was given for it. His death was suffered for it."⁴⁷ It is the personal unity and integrity which this new discovery made possible for Rauschenbusch by enabling him to integrate his religious and social concerns which made it so important to him, as the continuation of the above statement makes clear.

⁴⁶Rauschenbusch's socialism is nowhere more clearly evident than in the book which made him famous, Christianity and the Social Crisis, New York (1907). Nor is he afraid of the term "communism" which he finds possesses affinity with Christianity and has long been the Christian ideal. Cf. Christianity and the Social Crisis, pp. 388-390. Socialism he treats as the logical outcome of the labor movement, *ibid.*, pp. 406-409. Of course, such opinions were quite acceptable in America before October, 1917. The first, and perhaps the most insane, anti-communist crusade occurred in 1919-1921, preached by Mr. Lust and attorney general Palmer. Under the able leadership of Mr. Palmer, more than 50,000 "suspects" were deported from the country in this first Red Scare. Rauschenbusch, having died in 1918, fortunately did not have to experience this or, indeed, the entire fiasco of the "return to normalcy," which would have broken his heart. Cf. Paul A. Carter, The Decline and Revival of the Social Gospel, Ithaca, New York (1954).

⁴⁷Walter Rauschenbusch, Christianizing the Social Order, p. 93. In the field of Old Testament and therefore never attempted to work out a consistent interpretation of the Book but remained dependent on Smith and other professional Old Testament scholars.

⁸⁰Karl August von Hase, Geschichte Jesu, Leipzig, (1875) 1891, 2nd edition.

with ⁵¹When the Kingdom of God dominated our landscape, the perspective of life shifted into a new alignment. I felt a new security in my social impulses. The spiritual authority of Jesus Christ would have been sufficient to offset the weight of all the doctors, and now I knew I had history on my side. But, in addition, I found that this new conception of the purpose of Christianity was strangely satisfying. It responded to all the old and new elements of my religious life--the saving of the lost, the teaching of the young, the pastoral care of the poor and the frail, the quickening of starved intellects, the study of the Bible, church union, political reform, the reorganization of the industrial system, international peace--it was all covered by the one aim of the reign of God on earth."⁴⁸ Interpretation

That German New Testament scholarship, which was in 1891 occupied and pre-occupied with the quest for the historical Jesus, the central proposition of Harnack's *History of Dogma* that the played an important role in directing Rauschenbusch's attention of Christianity," *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, p. 25.

to the centrality of the Kingdom of God in Christ's preaching and life is evident.⁴⁹ He considered Hase's *Life of Jesus*,⁵⁰ the book lying Harnack's turn-of-the-century lectures, *Das Wesen des*

Christentums, Berlin, (1901), came in for an especially scathing attack in which⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹It is more difficult to determine the influence of Old Testament scholarship on Rauschenbusch. In *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, pp. 1-43, he discusses the prophets, assigning to them a 'more or less' normative role in the Old Testament, and views them as representatives of the same sort of ethical and social religion which Jesus himself championed. Most frequent reference in this chapter is to Sir George Adam Smith's commentary on the twelve minor prophets, *The Book of the Twelve Minor Prophets*, Expositors' Bible, IV, pp. 432-692. A new printing was made in 1954. Smith was an eminent British Old Testament scholar. Thoroughly versed in German Old Testament scholarship, he makes frequent shall references to Ewald, Kautsch, Delitz, Wellhausen, Duhn, and others. Rauschenbusch himself, as he remarks in a footnote on p. 43 of *Gospel, Christianity and the Social Crisis*, was not professionally competent in the field of Old Testament and therefore never attempted to work out a consistent interpretation of the Book but remained dependent on Smith and other professional Old Testament scholars.

⁵⁰Karl August von Hase, *Geschichte Jesu*, Leipzig, (1876) 1891, 2nd edition.

with which this scientific quest opened, a landmark in church history. This scientific quest, Rauschenbusch believed, offered Christians the possibility of piercing the mist which the Church's ritual and dogma had raised about the historical Jesus and of discerning his true intention.⁵¹ In accepting, or rather being overcome by, the discovery of the "Questers" that the idea of the Kingdom of God was at the center of Jesus' life, ministry, and death, Rauschenbusch accepts what these "Questers" have in common. The interpretation assigned to Jesus' idea of the Kingdom varied greatly, however, from scholar to scholar, and Rauschenbusch seems not to have been satisfied with any of the interpretations in vogue in Europe and particularly in Germany.⁵² He himself worked out an interpretation

Kingdom of God cannot be completely realized on earth since

⁵¹Rauschenbusch shares Harnack's view of the history of dogma as a process of Hellenization. "We shall not get away from the central proposition of Harnack's History of Dogma that the development of Catholic dogma was the process of Hellenization of Christianity," A Theology for the Social Gospel, p. 250.

however, ⁵²and it belongs to the responsibility of the personally
The eschatological interpretation of Schweitzer and Weiss and the individualized, spiritualized interpretation underlying Harnack's turn-of-the-century lectures, Das Wesen des Christentums, Berlin, (1901), come in for an especially stormy attack in which something of the socialist's scorn for the petty bourgeoisie can be felt and this is most unusual in the gentle Rauschenbusch. He writes concerning such interpretations: "My own conviction is that the professional theologians of Europe who all belong by kinship and sympathy to the bourgeoisie classes and are constitutionally incapacitated for understanding any revolutionary ideas, past or present, have overemphasized the ascetic and eschatological elements in the teachings of Jesus. They have classed as ascetic or apocalyptic the radical sayings about property and non-resistance which seem to them impractical or visionary. If the present chastisement of God (Rauschenbusch was referring to World War I.) purges our intellects of capitalistic and upper-class iniquities, we shall no longer damn these sayings by calling them eschatological, but shall exhibit them as anticipations of the fraternal ethics of democracy--prophecies of social common sense." A Theology for the Social Gospel, p. 158.

emphasizing the historical and social nature of the Kingdom, conceiving it as, "humanity organized according to the will of God,"⁵³ as "the last social ideal of Christendom."⁵⁴ It is easy to see how this theology of the kingdom, deriving its authority from the historical Jesus, is related to Rauschenbusch's socialistic economic and political convictions. Nevertheless Rauschenbusch refused simply to identify the Kingdom of God, the object of his religious quest, with the Socialists' utopia. The Kingdom is distinguished from the Socialists' utopia first of all by its origin in God's action,⁵⁵ secondly by its close relationship to and dependence upon which personal religion,⁵⁶ and finally by its supra-historical--not to say unhistorical--dimension. Unlike a socialistic utopia, the Kingdom of God cannot be completely realized on earth since there can be no perfection on earth, but only a gradual development toward perfection.⁵⁷ Growth toward perfection there can be, however, and it belongs to the responsibility of the personally

convinced Christian to co-operate with the action by which God

⁵³In 1893 the Brotherhood expanded to twelve and took an ecumenical direction with the admission of non-Baptist members. The Brotherhood was published as *Report of the Conference of the Brotherhood of the Kingdom*.
⁵³Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, p. 140.

⁵⁴Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order*, p. 49. Rauschenbusch's own thoughts, Williams, in particular, who from the beginning

⁵⁵"The Kingdom of God is divine in its origin, progress, and consummation It is miraculous all the way, and is the continuous revelation of the power, the righteousness, and the love of God." *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, p. 131. evangelical character which Rauschenbusch's writings retain throughout his career

⁵⁶"The powers of the Kingdom of God well up in the individual soul; that is where they are born and that is where the starting point must necessarily be." "The Kingdom of God," in Handy's anthology, *The Social Gospel in America*, p. 267. American Social Christianity is

⁵⁷Handy, *op. cit.*, p. 257.
Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, Harper Torchbook, New York (1953), p. 216.

is bringing his Kingdom slowly to perfection.

After this decisive year in Europe, Rauschenbusch (1868), returned in 1892 to America where he became one of the leaders of the Social Gospel Movement. In 1892 he founded, along with two fellow-Baptist ministers, Nathaniel Schmidt and Leighton Williams, the Brotherhood of the Kingdom, one of the most remarkable of the Social Gospel societies.⁵⁸

He was married to Miss Pauline E. Rather in 1893, and continued to write and speak in behalf of the Social Gospel until 1897, when he was called by Rochester Theological Seminary to teach in its German department, thus occupying a chair which his father had occupied before him. In 1902 he became professor of church history on the regular faculty of the Seminary, and it is in this capacity that he wrote that series of books which gave to the Social Gospel its classic formulation and made him internationally famous.⁵⁹ The first of these, Christianity and the Social Crisis,⁶⁰ Rauschenbusch thought would cost him his

⁵⁸In 1893 the Brotherhood expanded to twelve and took on an ecumenical dimension with the admission of non-Baptist members. The Brotherhood met annually until 1915 and many of the discussions were published as Reports of the Conferences of the Brotherhood of the Kingdom. Certainly the discussions of the Brotherhood influenced Rauschenbusch's own thoughts. Williams, in particular, who from the beginning had shown definite mystic tendencies and eventually converted to Episcopalianism, always warned the Society to avoid allowing ethical and social concerns to usurp the primary place which rightfully belongs to the religious moment. Perhaps the strong evangelical character which Rauschenbusch's writings retain throughout his career is in part the result of this influence exerted upon him from within the Brotherhood. Cf. Hopkins, p. 133.

⁵⁹"The classic statement of American Social Christianity is that of Walter Rauschenbusch." Hopkins, p. 216.

⁶⁰Walter Rauschenbusch, Christianity and the Social Crisis, Harper Torchbook, New York (1952).

position. Instead, appearing at the height of the progressive movement, during Theodore Roosevelt's second term (1904-1908), Christianity and the Social Crisis appealed to the mood of the time and won for the author national praise and recognition.⁶¹ Christianity and the Social Crisis was followed by two other major works, Christianizing the Social Order,⁶² a book which reflects the optimism occasioned in Rauschenbusch by the unexpectedly favorable reception of Christianity and the Social Crisis, and A Theology for the Social Gospel,⁶³ his last book and the most significant attempt of the Social Gospel to deal seriously in the dogmatic heritage of Christianity.⁶⁴

standing of God is often closely related to a Christocentric

⁶¹President Roosevelt assured Rauschenbusch that the country would never need to embrace Socialism, since his administration would accomplish all those reforms which Rauschenbusch was advocating. Cf. Cross's Introduction to Christianity and the Social Crisis, (Harper Torchbook edition).

⁶²Walter Rauschenbusch, Christianizing the Social Order.
love of God.⁶⁵ Secondly, post-Bushnellian theology in America

⁶³Walter Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel.
is marked by its strong ethical character. The God of love

⁶⁴Other works by Rauschenbusch were For God and the People: Prayers of the Social Awakening, Boston (1910), a book which indicates how profound were the "religious" roots of Rauschenbusch's social concern; Unto Me, Boston (1912), a small book which he wrote for social workers and in which evangelical and social themes are combined in a manner typical of Rauschenbusch; Dare We Be Christians?, Boston (1914), a commentary on I Corinthians, Chapter 13; and The Social Principles of Jesus, New York (1916), a handbook for college study groups written to be used as a part of a four-year curriculum cycle. This is the most widely circulated of Rauschenbusch's books. For fuller treatment of Rauschenbusch see Doris R. Sharpe, Walter Rauschenbusch, New York (1942); C.H. Hopkins, The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Christianity, Oxford (1940), Chapter XIII, p. 216 ff.; and his "Walter Rauschenbusch, The Brotherhood of the Kingdom," in Church History, VII, pp. 138-156; Vernon P. Bodein, The Social Gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch and Its Relation to Religious Education, New Haven (1944); R.D. Cross's Introduction to the reprint of Rauschenbusch's Christianity and the Social Crisis, Harper Torchbook, (1964); Smucker, The Origins of Walter Rauschenbusch's Social Ethics, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Chicago (1957); and

Conclusion. To these ethical demands absolute precedence is given. This chapter began with a discussion of the new ⁵⁴ theology of Horace Bushnell with which a liberal epoch in American theology began. The theology of this period ⁵⁵ bears certain marks by which it can be clearly identified, three of which are most significant for this study. The first mark is seen in the concept of God which distinguishes the theology of the post-Bushnellian epoch from that of earlier pre-Civil War epoch. In the theology influenced by Bushnell, the imagery of God as judge is allowed to atrophy and a consistent understanding of God in terms of love is worked out. This understanding of God is often closely related to a Christocentrism which sees the historical Jesus as the expression of God in a finite form and understands the life of the historical Jesus ⁵⁶ rather as the revelation of the mercy, patience, and compassionate love of God. ⁶⁵ Secondly, post-Bushnellian theology in America is marked by its strong ethical character. The God of love, himself, a profoundly ethical being, comes to man making certain

him.
 "Multiple Motifs on the Thoughts of Rauschenbusch: A Study in the Origin of the Social Gospel," *Encounter*, XIX (1958), pp. 19-20; Stackhouse, *Eschatology and Ethical Methods*, Ph. D. Thesis, Harvard University, (1964). Many of Rauschenbusch's minor writings are collected in Benson Y. Landis', *A Rauschenbusch Reader: The Kingdom of God and the Social Gospel*, New York, (1957), are profoundly

⁶⁵ Thus Olmstead in describing the theology of Bushnell, Cf. Olmstead, *History of Religion in the United States*, Englewood Cliffs, (1960). To the theologians of this period this new understanding of God was profoundly liberating, emancipating them as it did from what Washington Gladden has described as an immoral theology. Cf. note 17, p. 9.

⁶⁶ Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Gospel*, p. 7. Cf. Carter, *op. cit.*, p. III.

ethical demands. To these ethical demands absolute precedence is given, even over specifically religious demands; indeed, religion becomes ethics. Thus Rauschenbusch can say in 1913, "Ethical conduct is the supreme and sufficient act."⁶⁶ Even be prepared to Finally, this liberalism is confident in man's ability to fulfill the demands of this ethical God, inasmuch as He Himself created man in His name and has promised to be with and help mankind. Thus, with His help, man can obey His demands and gradually perfect himself and his entire social order. The result is a religion of meliorism. These are the three marks of the liberalism dominate in America from the last decade of the nineteenth century until 1920 and they are organically related. The first characteristic is the concept of God which is ethicized by being subordinated to the concept of love, the second conceives response to this ethicized Being primarily or exclusively in ethical terms, and the third mark insists that God, being an ethical Being and having made man, must help man to fulfill the demands which He Himself has given him.

⁶⁷ Among the most sentimentalized documents of the Social Gospel. Within the theological domain defined by these three marks, many variations are possible. Thus one theologian may give serious consideration to the problem of evil, including in sentimentalize God's love while another defines it more profoundly Kingdom of Evil." Cf. Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social* in terms which assign meaning to suffering. One theologian may offered a course at Rochester succinctly called "The Devil." Cf. minimize the difficulties involved in the struggle to fulfill

Nevertheless, in spite of this realism which challenged the ethical call to obedience; another may see these difficulties the breaking point, he did not abandon any of the articles and becomes thus the best example of the basically liberal orientation of the Social Gospel.⁶⁶ Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Gospel*, p. 7. Cf. Carter, *op. cit.*, p. III.

more realistically. One may take personal and social progress and reform quite for granted as a part of the evolutionary of scheme of things; another, taking sin more seriously, may expect setbacks and be prepared for struggle; indeed, may even be prepared to use apocalyptic imagery symbolically to describe this struggle.⁶⁷ The marks themselves, however, remain at all times and identify the theology which bears them as liberal. The love of God, no matter how conceived, excludes the thought of his wrath. The ethical life, no matter how realistically the creed difficulties involved in achieving it are evaluated, remains the essence of religion; the continuity of progress within history toward personal and social perfection, no matter how intense the struggle it occasions and how many temporary setbacks it suffers, is not called radically into question but is rather universally accepted. The theology of all the Social Gospellers bears these marks of liberalism and thus is to be seen as one manifestation of that liberal theology which Bushnell played so important a role in introducing into America. It is the thesis

⁶⁷ Among the most sentimentalized documents of the Social Gospel movement are the many Social Gospel novels including the incredibly successful one of Sheldon. Rauschenbusch, on the other hand, showed hardly any signs of this sentimentalism, but gave serious consideration to the problem of evil, including in his last book, A Theology for the Social Gospel, a chapter on "The Kingdom of Evil." Cf. Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, Chapter IX, pp. 77-94. Moreover, Rauschenbusch once offered a course at Rochester succinctly called "The Devil." Cf. Olmstead, op. cit., p. 492.

Nevertheless, in spite of this realism which challenged his faith in the three articles of the liberal creed, perhaps to the breaking point, he did not abandon any of the articles and becomes thus the best example of the basically liberal orientation of the Social Gospel movement.

the second chapter of this paper that H. Richard Niebuhr, during the first decade of his writing career, is one of the men of the Social Gospel and that his writings during that time, like those of his Social Gospel colleagues, also bear these three distinguishing marks of liberalism which have been discussed

Introduction

above. Thus, in spite of reservations which begin to record themselves as early as 1925, H. Richard Niebuhr remains a Social Gospeler and a liberal during the twenties, continuing to be described as the Social Gospel Period.

to confess a belief in the three articles of the liberal creed discussed above. But that is the subject of Chapter Two of this paper. This period itself falls into two phases. In the first phase, which is represented among the published works by three short articles only,¹ Niebuhr's relationship to the Social

Gospel--particularly to the final formulation which it had won in the writings of Rauschenbusch--is one of unbroken continuity.

In the second phase, which begins in 1925 and ends with the publication in 1929 of Niebuhr's first book,² the interests and the theology of the Social Gospel persist but are somewhat differently applied. In between these two periods lies Niebuhr's

¹H. Richard Niebuhr's last book, *The Responsible Self*, put together from notes by his son, H.R. Niebuhr, appeared posthumously in 1963. H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, New York (1963). Another volume of Niebuhr's essays, perhaps two, is planned for future publication.

²H. Richard Niebuhr, "An Aspect of the Idea of God in Recent Thought," in *Theological Magazine of the Evangelical Synod of North America*, XLVIII (1920), pp. 39-44; "The Alliance Between Labor and Religion," *Theological Magazine of the Evangelical Synod of North America*, XLIX (1921), pp. 157-203; "Christianity and the Social Problem," *Theological Magazine of the Evangelical Synod of North America*, L (1922), pp. 278-391.

³H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America*, New York (1929), reprinted in 1954 and 1957.

CHAPTER TWO: H. RICHARD NIEBUHR AS SOCIAL GOSPEL THEOLOGIAN:
1920-1929

Introduction

Niebuhr's publishing career begins in 1920 and continues until his death in 1962.¹ The first decade of this career might be described as the Social Gospel Period. Arbor, Michigan.

This period itself falls into two phases. In the first phase, which is represented among the published works by three short articles only,² Niebuhr's relationship to the Social Gospel--particularly to the final formulation which it had won in the writings of Rauschenbusch--is one of unbroken continuity. In the second phase, which begins in 1925 and ends with the publication in 1929 of Niebuhr's first book,³ the interests and the theology of the Social Gospel persist but are somewhat differently applied. In between these two periods lies Niebuhr's

¹H. Richard Niebuhr's last book, The Responsible Self, put together from notes by his son, R.R. Niebuhr, appeared posthumously in 1963. H. Richard Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, New York (1963). Another volume of Niebuhr's essays, perhaps two, is planned for future publication.

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³H. Richard Niebuhr, The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America, New York (1929), reprinted in 1954 and 1957.

work on his doctoral dissertation.⁴

dissertation.⁴ to attempt to arrive at a general understanding

of Niebuhr's intention in the years from 1928 to 1925.

A. 1920-1925: The Early Social Gospel Period

As Hopkins repeatedly points out, the labor question

stood. Any generalizations on Niebuhr's earliest theological

position must be precarious because of the lack of material.⁵

Reinhold Niebuhr's *Theology for the Social Gospel*, although

⁴H. Richard Niebuhr, *Ernst Troeltsch's Philosophy of Religion*, doctoral dissertation for Yale Divinity School (1924), available on University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

attacks were launched on racism and nationalism.

⁵The primary literature consists of the twenty pages listed above, nor is there any help to be found in the secondary literature: The doctoral dissertations of Blackwood, *The Problem of Religious Knowledge in the Thoughts of Albrecht Ritschl*, William James, and H. Richard Niebuhr, Columbia University (1957); Damhorst, *Social Norms and Protestant Ethics: The Ethical Views of Reinhold Niebuhr and H. Richard Niebuhr*, St. Louis University (1963); Kliever, *Methodology and Christology in H. Richard Niebuhr*, Duke University (1957); and Hoedemaker, *Faith in Total Life*, Utrecht (1966), the last two of which have won considerable authority in the Niebuhr discussions since all are written from the systematic point of view. Hoedemaker, who more than the others considers the development in Niebuhr's thought, asserts that Niebuhr was never "a full-fledged Social Gospel adherent," *op. cit.*, p. 63, but is able to make this statement only by playing down the 1920-1930 writings and almost totally ignoring those prior to 1925. His statement that "one will look in vain for a dramatic, sudden turning point," *ibid.*, in the writings of Niebuhr is likewise controversial. It is true that Niebuhr's development was gradual; nevertheless, for one who looks back on *The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America* from the perspective of *The Church Against the World* published just six years later, the change seems both sudden and dramatic. Again Hoedemaker failed to give adequate consideration to the pre-1930 writings.

Likewise, the essays in the Niebuhr Festschrift, *Faith and Ethics*, edited by Paul Ramsey, New York (1957), reprinted as a Harper Torchbook (1965) are thematic in nature except for the second and third chapters on "Niebuhr's Theological Background" and "The Theology of H. Richard Niebuhr" by Hans W. Frei, but Frei considers only the mature theology of Niebuhr. Even Niebuhr himself, describing his theological development in "Reformation: Continuing Imperative," *Christian Century*, LXXVII (1960), pp. 248-251, begins with 1930. Some things can be gleaned from surveys like Smith and Jamison, *Religion in American Life*, I, Princeton,

these issues along with the major labor issue in all three of his main works.

With that word of caution in mind, however, it is necessary and possible to attempt to arrive at a general understanding of Niebuhr's intention in the years from 1920 to 1925. As Hopkins repeatedly points out,⁶ the labor question stood at the very center of the whole Social Gospel Movement from Gladden's 1876 manifesto⁷ to the closing salvos of Rauschenbusch's A Theology for the Social Gospel,⁸ although, particularly in the later writings of Gladden and Rauschenbusch, attacks were launched on racism and nationalism.⁹ It is significant that two of the three pre-1925 published articles of Niebuhr are devoted to a defense of precisely that cause which the Social Gospel had all along made

(1961), and Olmstead, History of Religion in the United States, Englewood Cliffs (1960), but for the most part an evaluation of the earliest period of Niebuhr's writing must be based on a careful re-reading of the Niebuhr articles themselves against the background of a knowledge of the Social Gospel as formulated in the writings of Rauschenbusch.

⁶Charles Howard Hopkins, The Rise of the Social Gospel in America (1865-1915), New Haven and London (1940). Hopkins' book has become the classical history of this movement.

⁷Washington Gladden, Working People and Their Employers, Boston (1876).

⁸Walter Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel, New York (1917).

⁹These attacks became more frequent as the war drew near and after it broke out. Thus Gladden wrote in 1916, at the end of his life, "If anything is central in Christianity, it is the obliteration of the lines of division between races and nationalities and the inclusion of the world in one brotherhood." Washington Gladden, The Forks of the Road, New York (1916), pp. 123-124. Quoted from Robert T. Handy, The Social Gospel in America, New York (1961). Rauschenbusch devoted space to a discussion of these issues along side the major labor issue in all three of his main works.

of the prophetic spirit."¹³ The second article, "Christianity and the Social Problem,"¹⁴ written a year later, is a defense, explanation, and propagation of the Social Gospel which Niebuhr insists is not a new gospel but the same gospel as that preached by the Old Testament prophets and Jesus, Paul, and John, surveyed from a different viewpoint--viz, the viewpoint of the Kingdom of God as opposed to an individualistic viewpoint.¹⁵ This Kingdom, whether it is to be realized here or beyond, is a social entity;¹⁶

which promotes an inhuman individualism by placing excessive

¹³Ibid., p. 203. A comparison of this article with Walter Rauschenbusch's section titled, "The Upward Movement of the Working Classes," in Christianity and the Social Crisis, pp. 400 ff., reveals many similarities. The labor movement is also praised in this article for furthering the cause of internationalism--thus Niebuhr's attitude toward nationalism is shown to be that of Rauschenbusch and Gladden.

On the other hand, because it subordinates human concerns to

¹⁴H. Richard Niebuhr, "Christianity and the Social Problem." economic ones, this same capitalism is responsible for the

¹⁵Hopkins points out how central the doctrine of the religious kingdom of God was in the theology of the Social Gospel Movement. The longest chapter in Rauschenbusch's A Theology for the Social Gospel, New York, (1917), is the chapter on "The Kingdom of God," which for him is clearly the hermeneutical principle for the interpretation of the whole Christian gospel. He also includes in the book a chapter on "The Kingdom of Evil."

private property, when valued more highly than the human

¹⁶Niebuhr avoids the debate between the worldly, ethical, or mystical, interpretation of the Kingdom of God and the other worldly, eschatological interpretation by calling the question "beside the point." What is important is not the "here" or the "beyond" alternative but the alternative individualistic, social, and since a kingdom is by nature a social entity, an individualistic interpretation is ruled out. H. Richard Niebuhr, "Christianity and the Social Problem," p. 279. It is interesting to note that Bultmann in his Das Evangelium von Johannes, on the contrary, not only interprets the Reich consistently as a present reality--attributing all references to a future consummation to the kichliche Redaktion--but also individualizes the kingdom, as his substitution of "Gottesherrschaft" for "Reich" in the translation of indicates. Bultmann, Das Evangelium von Johannes, p. 94.

however, it is a social entity which exists not for its own sake but for the sake of the individual members. It is threatened by the many ills of contemporary society. These can be organized under two categories: There are those that spring from excessive individualism and those that suppress personality. participant in this Movement. In addition to this positive There are many causes of individualism and of the suppression of personality but the greatest offender in both instances is the capitalistic system of industrial organization, which promotes an inhuman individualism by placing excessive power in the hands of those few individuals who control the means of production and by emphasizing the competitive principle to the exclusion of other, more human, considerations. On the other hand, because it subordinates human concerns to economic ones, this same capitalism is responsible for the suppression of personality which is so characteristic of the twentieth century. This supremacy of economic over human concerns is often embodied in institutions. The institution of private property, when valued more highly than the human personality which property should serve, is one example of this.

¹⁷This is, of course, a somewhat schematized presentation of the church's responsibility is to preach and live the Social Gospel, that is, the gospel of the Kingdom of God so that ities like divorce, rising crime rates, and juvenile delinquency, the spirit of capitalistic society which on the one hand breeds

¹⁸Hodgson, op.cit., p. 63.
rampant individualism and on the other suppresses personality is

thereby effectively challenged.¹⁷ Gospel Period

These two early articles show that the question of Niebuhr did not publish at all in the years 1923 and labor, so central to the whole Social Gospel Movement, also 1924, during which time he was working on his doctorate at Yale occupied the central position in Niebuhr's earliest works. under the direction of B.C. Macintosh. He finished the work, which This alone is sufficient to justify classifying him in those was on Ernst Troeltsch's philosophy of religion,¹⁹ and returned to years as a participant in this Movement. In addition to this the midwest to serve as president of Elmhurst College.²⁰ This positive concern, it is clear from the above summary of "The confrontation with Troeltsch was destined eventually to influence Church and the Social Problem" that Niebuhr continues the Niebuhr profoundly, but the full effect of this influence was attack on capitalism launched by the Social Gospel Movement delayed many years because of the powerful figure of Barth whose and systematized and radicalized by Rauschenbusch. That he huge shadow eclipsed that of Troeltsch for the Niebuhr of the fights for the causes of internationalism and racial brotherhood Thirties. After 1940 the Troeltschian influence began to assert on the side, similar again to Gladden and Rauschenbusch, is one itself once again and the Barthian eclipse, to wane,²¹ but these more reason for judging Hoedemaker's assertion that Niebuhr never two periods are the subject of later chapters of this paper. Here was a "full-fledged Social Gospel adherent"¹⁸ to be invalid, at it is necessary to examine those works published by Niebuhr after least for the years prior to 1925. When one adds to all these his return from Yale before his Barthian period--i.e., those considerations the fact that Niebuhr brought all these concerns works appearing from the years 1925 to 1929. Among these there into relationship with Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God-- are those which continue the line of development discussed above a doctrine so central to the theology of the whole Social Gospel and which, therefore, belong to the Social Gospel Movement and Movement--the point can be taken as made. those which prefigure the turn which Niebuhr's theology will take

after ¹⁷This is, of course, a somewhat schematized presentation of the article but is nevertheless true to Niebuhr's intention. Again, inside remarks, Niebuhr attacks nationalism and this time also racism along with various other more individualistic immoralities like divorce, rising crime rates, and juvenile delinquency. available on University Microfilm.

¹⁸Hoedemaker, op.cit., p. 63.

²⁰It was at this time, during Niebuhr's presidency, that Elmhurst College won accreditation. Cf. June Bingham, *Courage to Change: An Introduction to the Life and Thought of Reinhold Niebuhr*, New York (1961), p. 62.

²¹Cf. H. Richard Niebuhr, "Reformation: Continuing Imperative," *Christian Century*, LXXVII (1960), pp. 248-250.

B. 1925-1929: The Later Social Gospel Period and the First
of Niebuhr's major books.²²

Niebuhr did not publish at all in the years 1923 and 1924, during which time he was working on his doctorate at Yale under the direction of D.C. Macintosh. He finished the work, which was on Ernst Troeltsch's philosophy of religion,¹⁹ and returned to the midwest to serve as president of Elmhurst College.²⁰ This confrontation with Troeltsch was destined eventually to influence Niebuhr profoundly, but the full effect of this influence was delayed many years because of the powerful figure of Barth whose huge shadow eclipsed that of Troeltsch for the Niebuhr of the Thirties. After 1940 the Troeltschian influence began to assert itself once again and the Barthian eclipse, to wane,²¹ but these two periods are the subject of later chapters of this paper. Here it is necessary to examine those works published by Niebuhr after his return from Yale before his Barthian period--i.e., those works appearing from the years 1925 to 1929. Among these there are those which continue the line of development discussed above and which, therefore, belong to the Social Gospel Movement and those which prefigure the turn which Niebuhr's theology will take after 1930. It is the former works with which this section

¹⁹H. Richard Niebuhr, Ernst Troeltsch's Philosophy of Religion, unprinted doctoral dissertation, Yale University (1924); available on University Microfilm.

²⁰It was at this time, during Niebuhr's presidency, that Elmhurst College won accreditation. Cf. June Bingham, Courage to Change: An Introduction to the Life and Thought of Reinhold Niebuhr, New York (1961), p. 62.

²¹Cf. H. Richard Niebuhr, "Reformation: Continuing Imperative," Christian Century, LXXVII (1960), pp. 248-250.

²²The findings discussed and the recommendations made in these two articles are later incorporated in the book.

is concerned. These consist of three articles and the first²⁶ of Niebuhr's major books.²² Niebuhr switched his major attack

from capitalism to denominationalism. Perhaps he discovered

1. A Change in Emphasis

in his readings of Troeltsch for his doctorate the Weber-

1.1. Preliminary Investigation

Troeltsch-Tawney theory of the relationship between capitalism

It is the book, The Social Sources of Denominationalism and Protestantism. Although there is no indication of this in in America, with which the first decade of Niebuhr's career his doctoral dissertation,²⁷ it is nevertheless perhaps fair to closes, which furnishes the clue to his major concern during assume that he would have read more extensively in the historical these years and which enables one to discover both the con- works of Troeltsch than the specific references in the disserta- tinuity and discontinuity of these years with those which came tion indicator. Thus in any case, as will be pointed out below, before and after. This book, and two of the articles, "What by 1929 Niebuhr had appropriated not only the Troeltsch-Weber- Holds Churches Together?"²³ and "Churches That Might Unite,"²⁴ Tawney theory mentioned above but also several hypotheses con- which are progress reports on the investigations leading to tained in The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches and the publication of The Social Sources of Denominationalism in Groups,²⁸ and employed them extensively as working hypotheses in his America,²⁵ are distinguished from the articles of 1921 and 1922 own The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America. Among discussed above by the fact that in them problems such as the

labor question,²⁶ nationalism, capitalism, and racism are none of denominationalism in America, but is particularly evident in the longer directly but only indirectly under attack. The polemic because it makes the churches' attack on capitalism and nationalism in these works is directed rather against an ecclesiastical capitulation to the ethic of selfishness which underlines these evil--the evil of the division of the church into many denom- self. The article, "Christianity and The Industrial Classes," published inations--though, as will be pointed out later, capitalism, inter- ested in the question of labor throughout the period of his investigations on denominationalism.

²²H. Richard Niebuhr, "What Holds Churches Together?", Christian Century, XLIII (1926), pp. 346-348; H. Richard Niebuhr, "Christianity and the Industrial Classes," Theological Magazine of the Evangelical Synod of North America, XVII (1929), pp. 12-18; H. Richard Niebuhr, "Churches That Might Unite," Christian Century, XLVI (1929), pp. 259-261; H. Richard Niebuhr, The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America, New York, (1929), reprinted 1954 as and 1957. Torchbook, (1960), with a foreword by H. Richard Niebuhr. Niebuhr lists this book as among the ten which influenced him most.

²³H. Richard Niebuhr, "What Holds Churches Together?" (1963), p. 254.

²⁴H. Richard Niebuhr, "Churches That Might Unite"

²⁵The findings discussed and the recommendations made in these two articles are later incorporated in the book.

nationalism, and racism remain the ultimate enemies.²⁶ It is not clear why Niebuhr switched his major attack from capitalism to denominationalism. Perhaps he discovered in his readings of Troeltsch for his doctorate the Weber-Troeltsch-Tawney theory of the relationship between capitalism and Protestantism. Although there is no indication of this in his doctoral dissertation,²⁷ it is nevertheless perhaps fair to assume that he would have read more extensively in the historical works of Troeltsch than the specific references in the dissertation indicate. Thus in any case, as will be pointed out below, by 1929 Niebuhr had appropriated not only the Troeltsch-Weber-Tawney theory mentioned above but also several hypotheses contained in The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches and Groups,²⁸ and employed them extensively as working hypotheses in his own The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America. Among

²⁶This is clear from the whole of The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America, but is particularly evident in the first and last chapters of this book. Denominationalism is evil because it makes the churches' attack on capitalism and nationalism so ineffective, and is itself a compromise with, indeed almost a capitulation to, the ethic of selfishness which underlines these sociological evils, introducing this ethic into the church itself. The article, "Christianity and The Industrial Classes," published in 1929 is also an indication that Niebuhr continued to be interested in the question of labor throughout the period of his investigations on denominationalism.

²⁷Niebuhr deals in the dissertation with the philosophical and metaphysical side of Troeltsch's work.

²⁸Ernst Troeltsch, Die Soziallehre der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen, Berlin, (1911), published as Volume I of Gesammelte Schriften, English translation by Olive Wyon, (1931), republished as a Harper Torchbook, (1960), with a forward by H. Richard Niebuhr. This Niebuhr lists this book as among the ten which influenced him most. Cf. H. Richard Niebuhr, "Ex Libris," Christian Century, LXXIX (1962), p. 754.

these is the sociological explanation which sees ecclesiastical divisions as resulting from and reflections of more basic sociological divisions. Of course, the discovery by Niebuhr of such an inner relationship between capitalism and Protestantism and between sociological and ecclesiastical divisions would have had the effect of focusing his attention on the church itself and making him realize the necessity for overcoming the enemy intra muros before launching a general offensive on his strongholds of capitalism, nationalism, and racism in the world.²⁹

A second, more immediate reason for undertaking on investigation on denominationalism is more mundane. Niebuhr was assigned, or decided, to teach a course in symbolics at Elmhurst in the twenties,³⁰ soon after he had returned from Yale. The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America is the outcome of this course.³¹

²⁹Whether this focusing on the problem of denominationalism is in the first place occasioned by the discovery of Troeltsch and Weber, or whether Niebuhr first began to concern himself with them after he began his investigation, cannot be determined with absolute certainty. What is evident, however, is that he made extensive use of their findings, as the thirteen references to Weber plus the sixteen to Troeltsch in The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America prove.

³⁰Symbolics derives its name from "symbol" and is the course taught in all denominational seminaries on the symbolical writings of the church and especially those of the particular denomination to which the seminary belongs. According to the orthodox thesis, it is to defend these symbols that the denomination arose and the need to continually defend them is offered as the justification for the continued existence of the denomination.

³¹H. Richard Niebuhr, The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America, New York (1929), reprinted in 1954 and 1957, p. vii. This book, applying for the first time the principles of historical and sociological investigation to the American ecclesiastical scene, was revolutionary but is now considered classic.

³²H. R. Niebuhr, The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America, p. 21, and other passages.

for 11. Culmination of the Investigation in the Publication of The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America

historical. In this book, Niebuhr's first major work, he breaks with the theological explanation of denominationalism which had been generally accepted, calling it in the Preface to The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America, artificial and fruitless.³² and offers in its place what Sydney E. Ahlstrom calls, "an essentially Marxian diagnosis of America's primary ecclesiastical and social ill,"³³ applying within the context of this Marxian diagnosis categories taken from Weber and Troeltsch.³⁴

Several other theses developed by Weber and Troeltsch, always to Ahlstrom's designation of the analysis of The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America as "Marxist" cannot, however, be taken at face value. It is true that the actual history of Christianity and especially of American Christianity is explained predominately, indeed, almost exclusively, from a sociological viewpoint, and that church law, confessions, and

polity, are considered to be for the most part rationalizations after the fact.³⁵

It is also true that Niebuhr sees the economic factor as the primary one determining the history of society and thus also the church.³⁶ He refuses, however, to make economic

to Tönnies is to Religion and the Rise of Capitalism, London, 1926; certain insights from Harnack, particularly from his Expansion of Christianity

³²Ibid. the First Three Centuries, Berlin, (1902), also influenced Niebuhr, especially when Harnack's findings coincided with those

³³S.E. Ahlstrom, "H. Richard Niebuhr's Place in American Thought," in Christianity and Crisis, XXIII, (1963), p. 214

³⁴On this subject Niebuhr includes quotes from Die Soziallehre der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen, p. 27; on p. 29 of The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America. A few pages later, on

³⁵Cf. The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America, p. 13 f. Here Niebuhr, while admitting the role of rationalization, does nevertheless reject the idea that all religious opinions can be explained as rationalizations.

³⁶H.R. Niebuhr, The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America, p. 21, and other passages.

forces the only ones operating and names nationalism and racial animosities as independent factors influencing the course of historical development. Nevertheless, apart from these lower reservations, Ahlstrom's comment is correct since the primary thesis underlying The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America is that denominational divisions are the result not of theological disagreement but of sociological fragmentation—³⁶ particularly in economic status. In addition to this primary insight concerning the interaction of sociological and religious factors in the arisal of ecclesiastical divisions, Niebuhr adopted several other theses developed by Weber and Troeltsch, always taking into consideration Tawney's critique of these ³⁷ German scholars' position. Chief among these and the one ³⁸ which Niebuhr adopts most directly is Harnack's and Troeltsch's hypothesis which relates economic and religious aspirations and sees creative religious movements as the work of the lower classes.³⁸ It is clear that this thesis of Harnack and Troeltsch

³⁷ The references to Weber are all to Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie, Vol. I, which are the essays printed in 1903 under the title Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus. The primary reference to Troeltsch is to his Die Soziallehre der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen, Berlin, (1911), published in 1911 as Volume I of Gesammelte Schriften; Reference to Tawney is to Religion and the Rise of Capitalism, London, 1926. Certain insights from Harnack, particularly from his Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries, Berlin, (1902), also influenced Niebuhr, especially when Harnack's findings coincided with those of Troeltsch.

³⁸ On this subject Niebuhr includes quotes from Die Soziallehre der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen, p. 27; on p. 29 of The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America. A few pages later, on p. 33, he quotes from Harnack's Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries, Volume II, p. 106, on the same subject.

religious revolts of the poor."⁴¹ Following up this insight into the relationship between the economic-social position of the sectarians on the one hand and their theological and church-polity position on the other, Niebuhr illustrates how increasing economic and social prestige leads to a change in the sect's theology and polity.⁴² The adoption of this thesis as well as the manner in which Niebuhr develops it justify Ahlstrom's comment concerning the essentially Marxist tendency of Niebuhr's analysis.⁴³

⁴¹ Niebuhr's The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America, p. 19. Troeltsch mentions the connection between the sects and the lower classes in Social Teachings, Volume I, p. 331, but merely as a passing remark. Niebuhr, developing his whole investigation under the influence of a Marxist interpretation of history, gives more attention to this connection.

⁴² The examples listed are English Puritanism in The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America, p. 45; the Half-Way covenant of the New England Churches which provides a classical example of transition since it is a compromise between the old, strictly voluntary principle of membership by conviction and the universalistic membership-by-birth principle of the church, The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America, p. 20, and "Methodism," The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America, pp. 70-72.

⁴³ It is possible that Tawney's criticism of Weber has also influenced Niebuhr here. Although directed primarily at the Weber theory of the relationship between capitalism and Protestantism, which he accepts in principle in spite of this criticism, Tawney's critique contains an implied criticism of the whole manner in which Weber exaggerated the influence of ideas on the course of history. Cf. Tawney, Religion and The Rise of Capitalism, 1926, pp. x-xiii, especially xii-xiii, and Niebuhr's The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America, Chapter IV, note 9, p. 288.

⁴⁴ Cf. p. 40, especially footnote 28.

⁴⁵ Niebuhr, The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America, p. 79.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 79-80.

⁴⁷ Niebuhr, The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America, Chapter IV, pp. 77-105.

As indicated above,⁴⁴ Niebuhr adopted from Weber and Troeltsch the theory of the relationship between capitalism and Protestantism, particularly in its Calvinistic form.

While criticizing "the overstatements which have marked the rise of the theory"⁴⁵ Niebuhr is nevertheless of the opinion

that "It is not possible to disagree with the fundamental contention that a close relation has existed in modern times between these two great social movements and that they have profoundly influenced one another."⁴⁶ He employs this thesis

(Weber) as the foundation for his chapter on "The Churches of the Middle Class," in Social Sources of Denominationalism in America.⁴⁷ Moreover Niebuhr accepts not only the theory in

general but also the details as worked out by Weber, who sees the development as follows: (1) Luther's reinterpretation of

"calling," which assigned to it a secular rather than a purely

religious or secular meaning; (2) The adoption of this re-interpretation by Calvinism; (3) the subsequent development of

inner-worldly asceticism with its attendant release of energy for work in this world. Economics was the field in which most

of these energies were applied; (4) The reinforcement of these energies with religious motivation by the interpretation of

commercial interests. Ibid., p. 93. Here again in his emphasis in defining the relationship between capitalism and Calvinism, virtuous and industrious conduct, with the prosperity which a greater extent than Weber. Cf. Niebuhr, Social Sources, note 9, Chapter IV, p. 288.

⁴⁴Cf. p. 40, especially footnote 28.

⁴⁵Niebuhr, The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America, p. 79.

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 79-80.

⁴⁷Niebuhr, The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America, Chapter IV, pp. 77-105.

attends it, as a sign of election.⁴⁸ Here once more, the Marxist tendency of Niebuhr's analysis is indicated by the way in which he modifies the thesis of Weber, giving greater priority to economic factors.⁵² Niebuhr suggests that the commercial cities of France, the great centers of commerce on the Rhein, the Netherlands, England, the Swiss commercial centers, and the American colonies adopted Calvinism out of economic rather than religious interests,⁵³ and their continuance in this faith is explained by the fact that its principle corresponded to their own economic interests.⁵⁰ the church for society.

Among there are a number of other thoughts which Niebuhr appropriated from Troeltsch and employed in this book; most important is Troeltsch's study of the relationship between Protestantism and nationalism, particularly the Lutheran

Gospel who, although giving occasional attention to the questions

⁴⁸This is the development presented by Weber in *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*. Cf. Niebuhr, *Social Sources*, p. 95-97.

problem of labor.

⁴⁹Niebuhr, *Social Sources*, pp. 92-93.

⁵⁰Niebuhr, *Social Sources*, p. 94. Niebuhr points out that the commercial centers of Florence and Venice were also sympathetic to the Reformation and might have adopted the new faith if the feudal houses had not won their struggle with the commercial interests. Ibid., p. 93. Here again in his emphasis on the economic factor Niebuhr takes his lead from Tawney who, in defining the relationship between capitalism and Calvinism, emphasizes the priority of economic over religious interests to a greater extent than Weber. Cf. Niebuhr, *Social Sources*, note 9, which Chapter IV, p. 288. mention to Luther's German nationalism expressed in his exhortation to the German nation to save Christianity from its Latin degeneracy. Niebuhr, *Social Sources*, p. 133, and note 26, p. 290.

⁵²Niebuhr, *Social Sources*, pp. 26-78.

⁵³Gooch, *The History of English Democratic Ideas in the Seventeenth Century*, London (1961).

Protestantism.⁵¹ Other incidental Troeltschian influences are the use which Niebuhr makes of Troeltsch's Die Soziallehren in his chapter on "The Churches of the Disinherited,"⁵² but here the findings of other scholars, particularly Gooch,⁵³ are just as important.

2. Continuity of Concern

Niebuhr began his writing career following in the path of the Social Gospel blazed by Gladden and Rauschenbusch. His central concern was the responsibility of the church for society. Among all the social problems which the American churches faced in the twenties, the one with which Niebuhr was most concerned in the years prior to 1925 was the problem of labor. In this also he followed the example of the other theologians of the Social Gospel who, although giving occasional attention to the questions of nationalism and racism, are also primarily concerned with the problem of labor.

⁵¹Niebuhr refers in a footnote to Troeltsch's "Protestantisches Christentum und Kirche in der Neuzeit" in Kultur der Gegenwart, of Part I, Section IV. This reference is to Troeltsch's thesis that Protestant Christianity adopted the principles of nationalism, identified itself with a particular culture, and accepted in the place of papal sovereignty the divinely appointed king or the sovereign parliament. Niebuhr, Social Sources, pp. 122-123. A later reference in the same chapter, "On Nationalism and the Churches," is to the same article by Troeltsch, this time to the section in which Troeltsch calls attention to Luther's German nationalism expressed in his exhortation to the German nation to save Christianity from its Latin degeneracy. Niebuhr, Social Sources, p. 133, and note 26, p. 290.

⁵²Niebuhr, Social Sources, pp. 26-76. See also in American Thought, "Christianity and Crisis," XXII (November 25, 1963), p. 214.

⁵³Gooch, The History of English Democratic Ideas in the Seventeenth Century, London, (1898).

as 1929 After 1925 Niebuhr gave up attacking social problems directly, as he had done in "The Alliance Between Labor and Religion"⁵⁴ and "Christianity and the Social Problem,"⁵⁵ and with the help of insights won from Marx, Troeltsch, Weber, Harnack, Tawney, and others began to analyze the phenomena of denominationalism,⁵⁷ seeking to expose the forces which were responsible for the arisal and persistence of this phenomenon.⁵⁸

One could conclude from all this that Niebuhr's of interest in the problems of secular society had waned, that he had come to be the champion of a strictly ecclesiastical ecumenism, and that he therefore is not to be reckoned among the representatives of the Social Gospel after 1925. This, however, would be a false conclusion and a misunderstanding of the intention behind Niebuhr's investigations from 1925 to 1929, as well as a misreading of the book, Social Sources, in which

these investigations arrived at their final formulation. Since

⁵⁷Niebuhr, Social Sources, pp. 3-35 and 264-264.

Niebuhr's ultimate purpose for undertaking the investigation of

⁵⁸The evils of denominationalism do not lie, however, in denominationalism is the same as that for which he wrote the of denominationalism lies in the condition which makes an arisal of earlier articles, Ahlstrom's description of The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America as "a late flowering of the Social Institutions only, relevant, if not contrary, to the Gospel" is appropo⁵⁶ and the inclusion of its author even as late V of Chapter I, pp. 31-35, is relevant here.

⁵⁴Niebuhr, "The Alliance Between Labor and Religion," Theological Magazine of the Evangelical Synod of North America, XLIX (1921).

⁵⁵Niebuhr, "Christianity and the Social Problem."

⁵⁶Sydney B. Ahlstrom, "Niebuhr's Place in American Thought," Christianity and Crisis, XXIII, (November 25, 1963), p. 214.

as 1929 among the representatives of this Social Gospel is Niebuhr not only legitimate but necessary. as much a Social Gospel theolo-

Justification for this thesis can be found throughout the whole of the book, but the two kerygmatic chapters which form its beginning and end furnish the most conclusive evidence.⁵⁷

Here it becomes evident that Niebuhr's attack upon denominationalism derives its force from his understanding of denominationalism as

the church's capitulation to the particularistic ethics of

S. Theological Continuity, 1920-1929:

nationalism and racism and to the ethics of concupiscence

characteristic of capitalism.⁵⁸ Moreover, Niebuhr's closing

In the first chapter of this paper the theology which exhortation to the church to put an end to denominationalism is underlay the Social Gospel was identified as "liberal" by the motivated by his desire that the church play a more effective role presence of these marks. It has been the thesis of the first part in the struggle against social injustices and his belief that this of this chapter that Niebuhr's work throughout the 1920's is a con- is impossible so long as the enemy, disguised as denominationalism, situation of the theology of the Social Gospel. If this is so, then is allowed to continue his subversive existence within the church.⁵⁹ Niebuhr's theology throughout this decade should bear those same

three ⁵⁷Niebuhr, Social Sources, pp. 3-35 and 264-284. or Social

Gospel ⁵⁸"The evils of denominationalism do not lie, however, in this differentiation of churches and sects. . . . The evil of denominationalism lies in the condition which makes an arising of sects desirable and necessary: in the failure of the churches to transcend the social conditions which fashion them into caste-organizations, to sublimate their loyalties to standards and institutions only remotely relevant, if not contrary, to the Christian ideal." Niebuhr, Social Sources, p. 21. The whole section V of Chapter I, pp. 21-25, is relevant here.

⁵⁹"Denominational Christianity, that is, a Christianity which surrenders its leadership to the social forces of nationalisms and economic life, offers no hope to the divided world. Lacking an integrating ethics, lacking a universal appeal, it continues to follow the fortunes of the world, gaining petty victories in a war it has long lost. From it the world can expect none of the prophetic guidance it required in its search for synthesis." in Niebuhr, Social Sources, p. 275. Magazine of the Evangelical Synod of North America, ALVIA (1921).

Thus, from these two chapters it becomes evident that the Niebuhr of the years 1925 to 1929 is just as much a Social Gospel theologian as the Niebuhr of 1921 to 1922. The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America, far from representing a change in concern, represents only a tactical change occasioned by Niebuhr's discovery that the enemy, whom he has been urging the church to destroy, has been undermining the attack from within.

the meaningfulness of human ethical agency. The first threat

3. Theological Continuity, 1920-1929:

is Niebuhr's Liberal Theology deterministic Weltanschauung of modern

natural science and its challenge to the freedom of the will.

In the first chapter of this paper the theology which it is being met in "Recent Thought"⁵⁴ by the concept of a "finite God" who is not simply to be identified with the universe presence of three marks. It has been the thesis of the first part of the natural law, but is rather that "eternal tendency within things of this chapter that Niebuhr's work throughout the 1920's is a continuation of the theology of the Social Gospel. If this is so, then which makes for righteousness."⁵⁵

The second threat is the result of the naturalistic Niebuhr's theology throughout this decade should bear those same understanding of the universe arising particularly from the three marks of liberalism which characterized the earlier Social Darwinian concept of the survival of the fittest. Here the Gospel theologians. This chapter will close by examining Niebuhr's meaningfulness of human moral activity is threatened by the cosmic writings of this period for the presence of precisely those marks. and impersonal forces of evil against which it has to fight and

in a) The Beginning of the Decade: 1920-1925 If God also should

1) Concept of God

⁵¹Ibid., p. 33. Although Niebuhr offers certain reserves The first article published by Niebuhr, "An Aspect of the

Idea of God in Recent Thought,"⁶⁰ which in so many respects strikes James and Bergson among others, as unique in the Niebuhrian corpus, is for the present

⁵³So God also becomes the creator not of the totality of nature, but of the spiritual life of ethical progress and civilization.

⁶⁰H. Richard Niebuhr, "An Aspect of the Idea of God in Recent Thought" in Theological Magazine of the Evangelical Synod of North America, XLVIII (1921).

discussion most revealing. Beginning with the presupposition that "our definitions of God's nature are conditioned by our need of Him,"⁶¹ Niebuhr discusses in the article two needs of man which arose in the nineteenth century and continue to exist, and a new understanding of God which has been developed by⁶⁴ theologians, philosophers, and artists in response to those needs. Both of these needs arose as a result of threats to the meaningfulness of human ethical agency. The first threat is posed by the mechanistic-deterministic Weltanschauung of modern natural science and its challenge to the "freedom of the will. It is being met in "Recent Thought"⁶² by the concept of a kind "finite God" who is not simply to be identified with the universe or the natural law, but is rather that "eternal tendency within things which makes for righteousness."⁶³ to harmonize the concept of God. The second threat is the result of the naturalistic understanding of the universe arising particularly from the Darwinian concept of the survival of the fittest. Here the meaningfulness of human moral activity is threatened by the cosmic and impersonal forces of evil against which it has to fight and in comparison with which it appears so weak. If God also "should

supplemented Bushnell's more Biblical understanding of God as

⁶¹Ibid., p. 39. Although Niebuhr offers certain reservations to the statement, he, nevertheless, accepts it in principle.

⁶²Particularly pragmatism and vitalism. Niebuhr names James and Bergson among others. U. G. Wells without indicating the work from which he is quoting. Ibid., p. 43.

⁶³So God also becomes the creator not of the totality of nature, but of the spiritual life of ethical progress and used civilization." Ibid., p. 41.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 41.

in some way be identified with, or thought of as responsible⁶¹
 for that life-force which "pants on the jungle trek in the
 tiger, and lifts itself toward heaven as a tree, which crawls,
 flies, lusts, and preys, pursues, and eats itself in order to
 live still more eagerly and hastily,"⁶⁴ the odds would be too
 great and it would be impossible to save humanity from the
 threat of meaninglessness. Therefore, God must be understood
 as having nothing to do with all that but rather as "a person-
 ality who reveals himself as the 'Captain of Humility, the
 Invisible King, who faces "the blackness" of the Unknown and,
 the blind confusions and joys of life, as one who leads mankind
 through a dark jungle to a great conquest!"⁶⁵
 This concept of God as finite is clearly designed to
 eliminate the idea of God as judge--to harmonize the concept
 of God with the ideals of love and progress so dear to the
 nineteenth century. It is precisely this which Bushnell had
 set out to do in the forties and in which the early Social
 Gospelers, especially Gladden and Rauschenbusch, followed him;
 though now the colorless and extremely impersonal understanding
 of God as "an eternal tendency, making for righteousness," has
 supplanted Bushnell's more Biblical understanding of God as
 Father.⁶⁶ Although Niebuhr does not identify himself with the

⁶⁴Niebuhr quotes from H.G. Wells without indicating the work from which he is quoting. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, The quotation is another from H.G. Wells used by Niebuhr and again undocumented.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, p. 41.

"Recent Thought" here discussed, his concluding remarks reveal marked sympathies with this thought.⁶⁷

supposition on which these efforts are based; namely, that

11. Subjection of Religion to Ethics

religion derives its meaning from its significance for ethics.⁶⁹

That both threats in response to which "Recent Thought"

111) Meliorism

formulated its concept of a finite God were threats to the

The third mark which the theology underlying the meaningfulness of human ethical activity indicates the second Social Gospel bore and which identified it as liberal was its mark which this modern theological thought bears and which optimistic confidence in man's ability to progress toward the identifies it as liberal, viz. its subordination of religious perfection of himself and his society. This confidence resulted interests to ethical ones. According to such modern theology, In a religion of meliorism.⁷⁰ The very names which Wells chooses the meaning and purpose of religion is to render metaphysical for his God, "Captain of Humility," "Invincible King, Who leads support to human ethical activity. This, religion does chiefly mankind through a dark jungle to a great conquest,"⁷¹ indicate through the concept of God on which it is based. Therefore, the melioristic tendency of his position.

when the concept of God which prevails in a religion is no

Though Niebuhr himself seems most critical of this last longer capable of supporting the assertion that "The efforts characteristic of "Recent Thought" on God, nevertheless, he of man are of crucial importance,"⁶⁸ this concept must appears in the end to accept, with reservations, this meliorism, be modified. The modification suggested by "Recent Thought" asserting in the last sentence of the article that the "Christian is that God be conceived of as "finite," since only on the basis of such a concept of God can the meaningfulness of human the battle for righteousness."⁷² ethical action be preserved.

Once again Niebuhr does not identify himself with the position: "Continuing Imperative," Christian Century, LXXVII (1930), p. 248, pragmatists, vitalists, or with Wells, but shows marked sympathy

⁶⁷Ibid. As Niebuhr himself points out in this article, the religious which follows from the "Recent Thought" defining God as "finite" is melioristic. This position (here he is speaking of Jesus) is melioristic. "This position (here he is speaking of Jesus) is melioristic." H. Richard Niebuhr, "An Aspect of the Idea of God in Recent Thought," p. 41.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 41.

⁷²Ibid., p. 44.

for their efforts, commenting on their formulations in such a way as to justify the assumption that he accepts the presupposition on which these efforts are based, namely, that religion derives its meaning from its significance for ethics.⁶⁹

underlying the Social Gospel movement from Gladden to Rauschenbusch

iii) Meliorism

here and must be considered therefore in theological continuity

The third mark which the theology underlying the Social Gospel bore and which identified it as liberal was its assimilation of "Recent Thought's" concept of a finite God, it moves optimistic confidence in man's ability to progress toward the perfection of himself and his society. This confidence resulted in a religion of meliorism.⁷⁰ The very names which Wells chooses for his God, "Captain of Humility," "Invincible King, Who leads mankind through a dark jungle to a great conquest,"⁷¹ indicate the melioristic tendency of his position.

Though Niebuhr himself seems most critical of this last characteristic of "Recent Thought" on God, nevertheless, he appears in the end to accept, with reservations, this meliorism, asserting in the last sentence of the article that the "Christian Gos. . . . is the Captain of Humanity and the Leader in the battle for righteousness."⁷²

⁶⁹Niebuhr's own comment on his development in "Reformation: Continuing Imperative," *Christian Century*, LXXVII (1960), p. 248, lends support to this assumption.

⁷⁰As Niebuhr himself points out in this article, the religious approach which follows from the "Recent Thought" defining God as "finite" is melioristic. "This position (here he is speaking of James) issues in the religion of meliorism." H. Richard Niebuhr, "An Aspect of the Idea of God in Recent Thought," p. 41.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁷²*Ibid.*, p. 44.

paragraph If then, as seems probable, Niebuhr's own theological thought in 1920 is similar to the thought which he describes in "Aspects of the Idea of God in Recent Thought,"⁷⁴ it bears all three of the distinguishing marks of liberalism which the theology underlying the Social Gospel movement from Gladden to Rauschenbusch bore and must be considered therefore in theological continuity with this movement. But, more than this, to the extent that it assimilates "Recent Thought's" concept of a finite God, it moves beyond the liberalism of the Social Gospel, drawing a conclusion which was perhaps implicit from the beginning of the liberal movement but which even Rauschenbusch would hardly have been prepared to draw,⁷³ viz., that God is the eternal tendency within things making for righteousness, and who can be understood

only in terms of "sacrificing love."⁷⁷ He is the Father-God

1929

who in the gospel of Jesus Christ reveals to mankind "their

b) The End of the Decade: 1925-1929

⁷⁴There will be no attempt here to examine in detail all the If Niebuhr's theological position in 1920 at the beginning consist in the doctoral dissertation on Ernst Troeltsch which, of the period under discussion in this chapter can be identified own thinking, and thus not relevant to this discussion, and as essentially continuous with that of the Social Gospel theologians International Journal of Religious Education, III (1927), by the presence in both theological positions of the same three, as indicated above, are progress reports on the investigations liberal marks, nothing is thereby proven concerning Niebuhr's and are integrated into this book. Three have been treated above in position in 1929, the year with which this chapter ends. In this later chapter.

⁷³It is doubtful if Niebuhr himself accepts this final formulation of liberalism even in 1920. The most that can be implied from the article is that he is involved in a flirtation with this thought. Certain evangelical influences, however, centered about the symbol of the cross prevent him from a complete acceptance of this "recent thought." Cf. *ibid.*, p. 44.

paragraph; therefore, it is necessary to examine The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America for the presence or absence of these same three features of liberalism.⁷⁴

of an eternal life in self-sacrificing devotion to the
 1) Concept of God
 Beloved Community of the Father and all the brethren."⁷⁵

Nevertheless, the concept of God which underlies the exhortations with which The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America opens and closes is not that of the extreme liberalism discussed in the article above, but is that of the more evangelical liberal liberalism of Bushnell, Gladden, and Rauschenbusch. Here God is conceived of not as "the eternal tendency making for righteousness"⁷⁵ but as the "Christlike God" of the Gospel⁷⁶ who reveals himself in Jesus Christ and who can be understood only in terms of "sacrificing love."⁷⁷ He is the Father-God who in the gospel of Jesus Christ reveals to mankind "their

and 1929 is that Niebuhr has moved away from the more secularizing
⁷⁴There will be no attempt here to examine in detail all the writings which appeared between 1920 and 1929. These consist in the doctoral dissertation on Ernst Troeltsch which, being a work of pure research, is not indicative of Niebuhr's own thinking, and thus not relevant to this discussion, and seven short articles, one of which, "Jesus Christ, Intercessor," International Journal of Religious Education, III (1927), Number 4, pp. 6-8, is not available to me. Two of these articles, as indicated above, are progress reports on the investigations leading to The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America and are integrated into this book. Three have been treated above in the first section of this chapter; two will be discussed in a later chapter.

and the Social Gospel Movement from 1875 to 1918 comes most clearly
⁷⁵Op. Cit., p. 41.

⁷⁶H. Richard Niebuhr, Social Sources, p. 278.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 8.

potential childhood" to him and "their possible brotherhood with each other";⁷⁸ who offers to mankind an eternal love, "in which each individual can realize the full potentiality of an eternal life in self-sacrificing devotion to the Beloved Community of the Father and all the brethren."⁷⁹ Nevertheless this understanding of God as "Christlike" and "loving Father" is developed in The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America in such a way as to virtually exclude any meaningful understanding of God as judge. Precisely by this emphasis on God as loving Father, to the exclusion of God as judge, is the first of the marks which characterize the liberal theology of the Social Gospel theologians. Thus the concept of God present in Niebuhr's 1929 publication stands in continuity with the concept of God dominate in the Social Gospel movement. What has happened in the years between 1925 and 1929 is that Niebuhr has moved away from the more secular liberalism discussed in "An Aspect" toward the more evangelical liberalism of Rauschenbusch, but this movement remains within the bounds of liberal theology.

ii) Subjection of Religion to Ethics publication of Gladden's Working People and Their Employers. It was 1918 in which both Gladden and Rauschenbusch died. Therefore, these dates are often used to It is here that the continuity between Niebuhr in 1929 and the Social Gospel Movement from 1876 to 1918 comes most clearly

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 278.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 279.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 256.

to expression.⁸⁰ The opening and closing chapters of The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America are, in fact, nothing but ethical exhortations in which it becomes clear that in the writing of the book Niebuhr's ethical interests were overwhelmingly dominant. Niebuhr intends through this book to fight the "domination of class and self-preservative church ethics over the ethics of the gospel,"⁸¹ a domination aided and abetted by denominational divisions. It is because denominationalism "signalizes the defeat of the Christian ethics of brotherhood by the ethics of caste"⁸² that it is attacked and exposed in this study. It is because "denominationalism thus represents the moral failure of Christianity"⁸³ that it must be overcome. To put the matter positively, it is in order to solve "the problem of synthesis of culture--of the building up of an organic whole in which the various interests that separate nations and classes will be integrated into a harmonious, interacting society, serving one common end in diverse manner"⁸⁴--that denominationalism must be overcome since "denominational Christianity, that is, a Christianity which surrenders its leadership to the social forces.

⁸⁰The year 1876 is the date of publication of Gladden's Working People and Their Employers. It was 1918 in which both Gladden and Rauschenbusch died. Therefore, these dates are often used to mark the beginning and the end of the most fruitful stage of the Social Gospel Movement.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 21. writings of F. B. Fournier: Philosophical Theology, 2 volumes, Cambridge (1928, 1930); The Origin and

⁸²Ibid., p. 22. Cambridge (1930); The Concept of Sin, Cambridge (1912).

⁸³Ibid., p. 25.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 266. The reason for this is the role which the crucifixion plays in Christianity from 1530 on.

of national and economic life, offers no hope to a divided world."⁸⁵ These, as well as any number of additional quotations from the opening and closing chapters of The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America, clearly indicate the dominance of ethical over religious interests in this book.⁸⁶ Thus, here again, by the presence in Niebuhr's 1929 theology of that second mark of liberalism which the theology of the Social Gospellers bore, continuity between these men and Niebuhr is established.

This confidence is expressed in a 1929 article which appeared in the official publication of his denomination.⁸⁹ In

iii) Meliorism

It is perhaps this last mark of liberalism which in Niebuhr is most modified, not only in 1929 but already in 1920. There is none of the superficial "triumphalism" which characterized so much of liberalism⁸⁷ to be found in Niebuhr's writings.⁸⁸ It must, however, be remembered on the one hand that such superficial optimism had been found in hardly any of the theologians

It may have led to a deeper understanding of personal salvation,

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 275.

but at the same time it eliminates an interpretation of Christianity

⁸⁶It is not only in the opening and closing chapters of the book that Niebuhr's predominate interest in the ethical issue is indicated. The manner in which the findings, which constitute the body of the book, are presented likewise indicates the precedence given to ethical over religious concern. Industrial Classes, The Theological Magazine of the Synod of North America, 1911 (1929).

⁸⁷Cf. e.g., the writings of F.R. Tennant: Philosophical Theology, 2 Volumes, Cambridge, (1928, 1930); The Origin and Propagation of Sin, Cambridge, (1906); The Concept of Sin, Cambridge, (1912).

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁸⁸The reason for this is the role which the crucifixion plays in Niebuhr's thought from 1920 on.

of the Social Gospel, rooted as they were in concrete practical experience, but that they had on the contrary known how to take suffering and the necessity for struggle seriously, so much so that they were often able to make sense of apocalyptic imagery--demythologizing it to be sure, but not ridiculing it. On the other hand, equally to be remembered is that in spite of Niebuhr's rejection of a superficial liberalism he, like his predecessors in the Social Gospel Movement, remains confident of man's ability through hard work, sacrifice, and suffering to progress toward realization of the Kingdom of God on earth.

This confidence is expressed in a 1929 article which appeared in the official publication of his denomination.⁸⁹ In a curious paragraph on millenarianism, he suggests that the "complete substitution of a heaven and hell eschatology"⁹⁰ for the frankly millenarian apocalypticism of late Judaism and many Christian sects which "were at one in their expectation of a new heaven and a new earth, of the removal of injustices and of the establishment of the Kingdom of God"⁹¹ was not entirely good.

It may have led to a deeper understanding of personal salvation, but at the same time it eliminated an interpretation of Christianity which contained significant ethical and social implications and Christian theology of a demythologized millenarianism. There is no proof of direct dependence of Niebuhr on Harnack, but the extent

⁸⁹H. Richard Niebuhr, "Christianity and The Industrial Classes," The Theological Magazine of the Synod of North America, LVII (1929), pp. 12-18.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 17.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 279.

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 280.

led to the arising of a new secular millenarianism, Marxist-Leninist philosophy. The implication of the article is that Christian theology would do well to restore to millenarianism its rightful place of honor.⁹² All this indicates distinct melioristic tendencies in 1929. A second evidence of Niebuhr's restrained confidence in man's ability to progress is indicated by several passages in The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America. Niebuhr is, for example, confident that "the Christianity of the gospels doubtless contains the . . . ideal . . . that can bring inner unity to the world."⁹³ He is convinced that if the church discovers anew this ideal and acts upon it, then she will awaken "an answering response in many a human heart,"⁹⁴ since "throughout mankind there is a vast fund of latent energy and devotion which awaits release and guidance by such an ideal as that of the gospels."⁹⁵ The final evidence of the presence of what has been described as melioristic tendencies in the Niebuhr of 1929 is

is nevertheless some relationship between this cosmic kingdom

⁹²The position here taken by Niebuhr is, interestingly enough, very similar to that of Walter Rauschenbusch in Christianity and the Social Crisis, p. 105 ff, and in his Theology for the Social Gospel, p. 224. Rauschenbusch is recommending the restoration in Christian theology of a demythologized millenarianism. There is no proof of direct dependence of Niebuhr on Rauschenbusch but the extent to which the two discussions parallel one another leads one to suspect such dependence.

⁹³Ibid., p. 275. The question here is not whether Niebuhr rightly understood it and reacted to it.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 279.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 275.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 280.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 275.

found in the sharp criticism of crisis theology which he includes in the closing section of The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America. Crisis theology, he says, "is just as ineffective as denominational Christianity."⁹⁶ It "regards the message of the gospel as applying to the individual's relation to a transcendental sphere alone and condemns every aspect of this present world, including culture, religious striving, and every attempt at amelioration of social evils as the expression of a depraved and lost will. . . . It has become a refuge for disillusioned followers of the Social Gospel. . . ."⁹⁷ To be sure, such a transcendental other-worldly theology may render a valuable criticism of a too provincial Social Gospel and it may be the source of profound insight into the religious life of the individual; nevertheless it is in the end an "escape from the world"⁹⁸ and is "simply irrelevant so far as the social task of Christianity is concerned."⁹⁹ The crisis theologians' insistence that the cosmic fact of the Kingdom of God transcends all human ideals and visions may be valid; there is nevertheless some relationship between this cosmic kingdom and these human ideals and visions. For this reason it is illegitimate for the church to seek to escape from her duty of

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 275.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 275. The question here is not whether Niebuhr rightly understood the intention of crisis theology, but only how he has understood it and reacted to it.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 275.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 276.

"dealing with the present world in the light of our highest ideas and best insights."¹⁰⁰ Crisis theology's condemnation of religion as a human enterprise simply ignores "the obligation of religion as a human enterprise for the three marks of liberalism, which lies upon religion. . . . to substitute the better for the this chapter can be concluded. The examination of Niebuhr's good or the less bad for the bad and to penetrate the stuff of writings from 1920 to 1929 has shown that throughout this existence, so far as possible, with so much of saving knowledge and so much of redeeming effort as are available."¹⁰¹ In this polemic against crisis theology the last characteristic of American liberalism--what we have called "meliorism"--is clearly present.¹⁰² This conclusion is supported by Niebuhr's own statement on his

theology¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 277. in which he says, "In the 1930's I had

given up¹⁰¹ Ibid. objection with that ethics and religion-centered

way of¹⁰² It is interesting to note that the liberalism underlying the Social Gospel Movement in America from Gladden on differed at a very significant point from the European liberalism so violently attacked by Barth in 1919 and again 1922. Whereas the European liberals were for the most part quite proud of the very rationalized civilization to which they belonged and were really defenders, consciously or unconsciously, of this status quo, the representatives of the Social Gospel were revolutionaries who, inspired by Marx and his followers and by the Russian Revolution, attacked the status quo--particularly the capitalistic-nationalistic principles--which to the German liberals seemed so "rational." The difference is seen quite clearly in the differing attitude which the two groups took toward Marxism on the one hand and to World War I on the other. Cf. Harnack's enthusiastic utterances in praise of Teutonic virtue as opposed to Slavic barbarity with Walter Rauschenbusch's and Gladden's very reserved and, indeed, sad comments on the war.

Conclusion

With this examination of The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America for the three marks of liberalism, this chapter can be concluded. The examination of Niebuhr's Introduction writings from 1920 to 1929 has shown that throughout this decade he shares both the interests of the Social Gospel years theologians and their basic liberal theological approach characterized by the presence of the three marks defined above. This conclusion is supported by Niebuhr's own statement on his theological development in which he says, "In the 1930's I had given up my connection with that ethics and religion-centered way of thinking about God and man which is roughly called restraints liberal."¹⁰³ characteristics underlying the thought of The Social Sources It is to these years of the 1930's that this study now turns. During those years Niebuhr underwent the same development which theology in general underwent. ethical inter-

pretation of religion, an interpretation which makes of Christ-
¹⁰³H. Richard Niebuhr, "Reformation; Continuing Imperative," Christian Century, (1960), p. 245. an absolutistic ethical code.

In the liberalism of the Social Gospel it is the implications of this code for social ethics which are emphasized; (3) Restrained, but nevertheless persistent, optimism regarding man's reforming abilities.² The primary new influence in Niebuhr's thought during

¹Viz. note 31, p. 14.

²The last chapter of Social Sources, titled "Ways to Unity," pp. 264-284, is an example of this basic optimism now under strong attack but holding out. Not only does Niebuhr hope for a unity of the Church which will overcome the evils of denominationalism but he also hopes that this ecclesiastical reconciliation will lead

those years was Troeltsch, but the Troeltschian relativism had not yet erased those liberal marks which Niebuhr had inherited from the Social Gospellers and which gave to Social

CHAPTER THREE: CRISIS AND RECONSTRUCTION

Sources its kerygmatic ring. Even less had the revolt of

Introduction crisis theology seriously threatened Niebuhr's liberalism prior to 1930.

It is the thesis of Chapter Two that during the years The years 1930 to 1940, the decade during which Niebuhr 1920 to 1930, Niebuhr was moving gradually away from that began to think in the categories which characterized his mature position characteristic of the Rauschenbuschian Social Gospel, thought, show the gradual disappearance in Niebuhr's thought under the influence of which he had begun his theological of those marks of liberalism which he had received from the career but that, in spite of this trend, his thought remained, Social Gospel and which furnished the pillars upon which the even as late as 1929, essentially within the bounds of the theology underlying his Social Sources had been built. The liberal theology of this school. Support for this thesis rests disintegration of Niebuhr's liberalism occurred under the impact upon three characteristics underlying the thought of The Social of two primary intellectual influences--the one coming to him Sources of Denominationalism in America, the book with which in 1929 this epoch of Niebuhr's writing career closes. These contemporary philosophy and psychology, the other from contemporary theology. The philosophical and psychological characteristics are: (1) Concept of God; (2) The ethical inter-influences, among which the thought of Ernst Troeltsch played so pretation of religion, an interpretation which makes of Christianity a way of life governed by an absolutistic ethical code.¹ The book ends, "The road to unity is the road of sacrifice which In the liberalism of the Social Gospel it is the implications in order that they may find the fulfillment of their better selves. of this code for social ethics which are emphasized; (3) Restrained, that is among us." Niebuhr, op. cit., p. 284. but nevertheless persistent, optimism regarding man's reforming abilities.² The primary new influence in Niebuhr's thought during

¹H. Richard Niebuhr, Perseverance: Continuing Imperative, Christian ¹Viz. note 31, p. 14. 249.

²The last chapter of Social Sources, titled "Ways to Unity," pp. 264-284, is an example of this basic optimism now under strong attack but holding out. Not only does Niebuhr hope for a unity of the Church which will overcome the evils of denominationalism but he also hopes that this ecclesiastical reconciliation will lead

those years was Troeltsch, but the Troeltschian relativism had not yet erased those liberal marks which Niebuhr had inherited from the Social Gospellers and which gave to Social Sources its kerygmatic ring. Even less had the revolt of European crisis theology seriously threatened Niebuhr's liberalism prior to 1930.

The Context: A Changing Historical Milieu

The years 1930 to 1940, the decade during which Niebuhr began to think in the categories which characterized his mature thought,⁴ show the gradual disappearance in Niebuhr's thought of those marks of liberalism which he had received from the Social Gospel and which furnished the pillars upon which the theology underlying his Social Sources had been built.⁵ The disintegration of Niebuhr's liberalism occurred under the impact of two primary intellectual influences--the one coming to him from contemporary philosophy and psychology, the other from contemporary theology. The philosophical and psychological influences, among which the thought of Ernst Troeltsch played so

toward the realization of the universal Kingdom of God on earth. The book ends, "The road to unity is the road of sacrifice which asks of Churches, as of individuals, that they lose their lives in order that they may find the fulfillment of their better selves. But it is also the road to the eternal values of a Kingdom of God that is among us." Niebuhr, op. cit., p. 284.

³Niebuhr's first confrontation with crisis theology is recorded in Social Sources, pp. 275-277. Cf. above, p. 63, note 96.

⁴H. Richard Niebuhr, "Reformation: Continuing Imperative," Christian Century, LXXVII, p. 249.

⁵H. Richard Niebuhr, "Religion and Ethics," World Tomorrow, XIII (1930), pp. 443-446.

important a role,⁶ will be investigated in a later chapter of this paper. It is the task of this chapter to trace the more strictly theological influences which contributed to Niebuhr's abandonment of liberalism.⁷

A. The Collapse of the Liberal Mentality in America

The Context: A Changing Historical Milieu

The acceptance by Niebuhr of the dual influences described above and the resulting collapse of his liberalism can only be understood in the context of the concrete historical events which occurred between 1925 and 1935 and which so altered

⁶Richard, as well as his brother, Reinhold, read Troeltsch as young men and were very impressed by his works, particularly by his command of historical facts and his understanding of historical reality. To how large an extent H. Richard at an early age was pre-occupied by the problems raised by Troeltsch can be seen by even a cursory reading of his excellent doctoral dissertation, Ernst Troeltsch's Philosophy of Religion, Yale University (1924). Niebuhr finished this work at the age of thirty. The persistence and profundity of this Troeltsch's influence was a fact of which he himself was aware. Cf. The Meaning of Revelation, p. x; The Kingdom of God in America, pp. 38, 201; Christ and Culture, pp. x, xii; 30f; 57; 172, note 14; 181f; "Reformation: Continuing Imperative." All the important expositions of Niebuhr's thought give much attention to this Troeltschian motif as well. Vide Hans Frei, "Niebuhr's Theological Background," Faith and Ethics, pp. 9-64, esp. pp. 53-64; Hoedemaker, *op. cit.*, pp. 63 ff. Vide, also, the interesting article by J. van den Berg, "Tussen Troeltsch en Barth," in Gereformeerd Theologisch Tydschrift, LXIII (1963), pp. 161-175.

⁷It is impossible, of course, to maintain a strict division between theological and philosophical interests and influences at work in Niebuhr or to isolate from one another the two developments in his thought which are here treated in separate chapters. Nevertheless, neither the chapter division nor the order of the chapters is entirely arbitrary but corresponds to the evolution of Niebuhr's theology from 1930 to 1962. Niebuhr himself furnishes the clue in "Reformation: Continuing Imperative," Christian Century, LXXVII (1960), p. 248.

relationship between historical events and theological developments, cf. Sydney Ahlstrom, "Theology in America: A Historical Survey," in Smith and Jackson's Religion in American Life, I, p. 316, and Carter, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

⁸Woodrow Wilson, Message Delivered to Congress, April 2, 1917.

the general intellectual mentality of America. Therefore, it is necessary in the introductory section of this chapter to briefly to refer to these events.⁸ In a second section the general religious and theological reaction will be cursorily presented before H.R. Niebuhr's specific development within this context is discussed in the concluding pages of the chapter.

American liberalism went to war in 1917 confident that this "war to end all wars" would "make the world safe for democracy."⁹ Because of this illusion and because of the geographical isolation of North America and the minimal suffering occasioned by the war in America and to Americans, American liberalism was not so immediately or profoundly shattered by this trauma as was its European counterpart. Nevertheless, that series of events which began in 1920 and continued nearly uninterrupted until 1939, leading the world into the economic and political chaos of the 1930's and ending with the outbreak of World War II, isolated liberalism more and more from the contemporary historical reality and alienated it from the intellectual mood of the time. A short resume of these events will serve to indicate the source of that disillusionment which came increasingly to characterize the younger generation of American theologians after 1930.

⁸This is intended not as a study of this historical period but only as a list of events which determined the psychological mood of the years 1930 to 1940--that decade in Niebuhr's life which is under discussion in this chapter. For a more detailed discussion of the relationship between historical events and theological developments, cf. Sydney Ahlstrom, "Theology in America: A Historical Survey," in Smith and Jamison's Religion in American Life, I, p. 310, and Carter, op. cit., p. 17f.

⁹Woodrow Wilson, Message delivered to Congress, April 2, 1917.

Coolidge The defeat of the Democrats in the election of 1920 had important effects on American domestic and foreign policy. Foreign policy returned to the principle of isolationism. The Congress refused to ratify the Treaty of Versailles and insisted on making a separate settlement with the various belligerents. Membership in the League of Nations, as well as in the World Court, was likewise refused by Congress, which considered these organizations to be threats to American sovereignty. international situation On the international front, various problems which served to increase the tensions between the nations arose during those years. Chief of these was the question of naval power, a question which had not been settled by the Treaty of Versailles. In an attempt to deal with this problem and to limit the size of naval forces, a series of conferences between the great naval powers¹⁰ was held, beginning with the Washington Naval Conference of 1921. Some successes were at first registered, the Washington Pact being signed in 1922, the Kellogg Naval Pact in 1929 and, as the outcome of the London Naval Conference, the London Naval Treaty of 1930 was signed by Great Britain, the United States, Japan, France, and Italy. These limited successes were outweighed, however, by the continued atmosphere of suspicion between the parties, by the important reservations attached by Italy and France to the London Naval Pact, and by the failure in 1927 of

conquest of Manchuria (Manchoukei) in earnest, turning a deaf ear

¹⁰Chief participants were Great Britain, United States, and Japan, with France and Italy sometimes participating and sometimes refusing. The Soviet government of Russia had come to the meeting with a very idealistic plan for total disarmament. When the other delegations laughed at this, they accused the Bourgeois nations of insincerity and took no active part in the discussions.

Coolidge's attempt to arrive at a treaty limiting the number of those types of vessels not covered by the Washington Pact of 1922. Moreover, by 1930, the year with which this chapter begins, these early successes were largely forgotten and that long list of failures which was to lead to World War II was beginning. One of the first and most dramatic of these failures was the First World Disarmament Conference held in Geneva under the auspices of the League in 1932, after which the international situation deteriorated very rapidly. The psychological effect of this failure was particularly large because the Conference had been in preparation since 1925 and had been so highly publicized that many nations and groups had come to attach great hopes to it, and to view it as a panacea for all the world's ills. Its failures also contributed to the increasing disdain for the League of Nations on the part of the Fascists and Bolsheviks¹¹ and probably aided the Fascists' forces in Germany on the eve of their seizure of power.

Internal developments in many other lands had also contributed to the general disorder characterizing international life in the Twenties and Thirties. On October 30, 1922, Mussolini had assumed power in Italy and was leading that nation into an increasingly chauvinistic program. After a coup in Japan in 1930, the military came to exercise more power, and in 1931 began the conquest of Manchuria (Manchoukuo) in earnest, turning a deaf ear

¹¹The Bolshevik government of Russia had come to the meeting with a very idealistic plan for total disarmament. When the other delegations laughed at them, they accused the Bourgeois nations of insincerity and took no active part in the discussions.

to all the moral exhortations of the League, withdrawing from that organization in 1932.¹² In 1933 the Weimar Republic finally succumbed to the complications with which it had been beset from the beginning and the most violent and lawless of dictatorships began in Germany. The final failure of the League and the demise of that organization began in 1935 when it failed to deal effectively with the crisis occasioned by the Italian invasion of Ethiopia.¹³ On February 26, 1936, after the victory of the Japanese liberals at the election, a military coup strengthened the powers of the military in Japan still further and the constant crises occasioned in Europe by Hitler's policies kept that continent in a state of neurotic tension until the outbreak of hostilities on September 1, 1939.

On the economic scene things looked equally dim during these years. The Republican victory of 1920 had meant for America the end of progressivism, which had never really enjoyed extensive support among the people but had depended on the popularity of individual persons, chiefly Theodore Roosevelt, and a return toward classical capitalism, laissez-faire economy, high tariffs, and a government policy generally favorable to big business and, more or less, anti-labor. High interest rates kept

¹² Japan had completed the conquest of Manchuria by September, 1931. The attempts of the League to get Japan to withdraw from Manchuria succeeded only in convincing her to withdraw from the League.

¹³ The economic sanctions imposed by the League against Italy failed to effect the economy of that nation sufficiently to cause her to halt her invasion.

¹⁴ For a more detailed discussion of the inter-relationships between the Social Gospel and the Spirit of the Times, see pp. 17-28; Chapter XI, "Preparation: The Social Gospel in the Great Depression," pp. 141-163; and Chapter XII, "The Social Gospel in the Great Depression," pp. 163-183. The economic sanctions imposed by the League against Italy failed to effect the economy of that nation sufficiently to cause her to halt her invasion. 1927 to 1941 receives special treatment but Carter also refers to H. Richard Niebuhr and John Bennett. Ahlstrom also discusses the relationship between historical factors and the collapse of liberalism. Ahlstrom, *op. cit.*, pp. 310ff.

money concentrated in a few hands. After an initial era of prosperity, depression began suddenly and dramatically with the crash of the New York Stock Exchange on October 24, 1929. The Depression soon spread to the entire western world and led to almost total economic stagnation. In spite of the vigorous policies of the Roosevelt administration, the problems, though somewhat alleviated, were not solved. The World Economic Congress, meeting in London in 1933, was unable to deal constructively with the basic problems of monetary policy and international trade restrictions and led to severe disagreements between the various parties and to higher, rather than lower, tariffs.¹⁴

B. The Theological Reaction: The Crisis of Theological Liberalism

American theological and religious thought, particularly that close to the Rauschenbuschian Social Gospel school with its central theme of the Kingdom of God on earth and its confidence in society's ability to achieve the realization, or near realization, was oriented in a sociological, economic, and political direction. Particularly influential is the *Christian Century*, which is a sort of after 1930, and particularly after 1930, the growing gap between and was therefore extremely sensitive to developments in the political and economic spheres.¹⁵ Indeed, the young theologians

¹⁴This historical resume is based on Walter C. Langsam, *The World Since 1914*, New York (1943).

¹⁵For a more detailed discussion of the inter-relationship between secular historical events and American theological developments from 1920 to 1930, see Paul A. Carter, *The Decline and Revival of the Social Gospel*, Ithaca, New York (1954), especially Chapter II, "The Social Gospel and the Spirit of the Times," pp. 17-28; Chapter XI, "Preparation: The Social Gospel in the Great Depression," pp. 141-163; and Chapter XII, "Impact: The Hundred Days and Afterwards," pp. 163-180. Here the role of historical events in the evolution of the thought of Reinhold Niebuhr from 1927 to 1941 receives special treatment but Carter also refers to H. Richard Niebuhr and John Bennett. Ahlstrom also discusses the relationship between historical factors and the collapse of liberalism. Ahlstrom, *op. cit.*, pp. 310ff.

of the twenties and thirties, reared in the Social Gospel school and, therefore, socially concerned, became increasingly dissatisfied intellectually and spiritually with that theological and religious liberalism upon which the Social Gospel was based and which dominated American intellectual and cultural circles prior to 1920.¹⁶ The impotence of the liberal world view and formulas was revealed each day in the headlines of the newspapers of the country, which these young theologians read with concern. Nor was the historical reality such as would elicit religious experiences similar to those which furnished the religious foundation for the theology of the great liberals.¹⁷

¹⁶"While the older Social Gospel had been in harmony with its social milieu, the new Social Gospel was in deepest disharmony with its setting." Carter, *op. cit.*, p. 31. By "older", Carter means that of pre-war days; "newer" is that represented by churches and theologians after 1920.

¹⁷The pages of the Christian Century, which is a sort of barometer of the religious situation in America, begin to reflect after 1920, and particularly after 1930, the growing gap between liberalism and historical reality as it was experienced in America. Particularly informative is the debate between editor Morrison and Reinhold Niebuhr on the issue of pacificism. For a special treatment of the Church's role in the peace efforts between the two wars and her reaction to the failure of this effort, see Doniven A. Lund, The Peace Movement Among the Major American Protestant Churches, (1919-1939), a doctoral dissertation available on University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan, Pub. No. 16243. The dissertation contains special reference to the League of Nations, the World Court, and the Kellogg Brand Pact. Carter, *op. cit.*, p. 134f, indicates the extent to which American Christendom was involved in the Peace Movement from 1920 to 1929, particularly under the leadership of the Federal Council of Churches. Virgilius Ferm's collection of intellectual autobiographies, Contemporary American Theology, (1932), also reveals what is happening.

¹⁸Does Civilization Need Religion?, New York (1927); Leaves from the Notebook of a Jewish Rabbi, New York (1933); Moral Man and Immoral Society, New York (1930); An Interpretation of Christian Ethics, New York (1933).

The clearest and most complete articulation of the trauma which the young generation of American theologians, and to a certain extent the American churches themselves, were undergoing under the impact of these events is the early writing of Reinhold Niebuhr.¹⁸ Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic is particularly interesting in this connection because, being a collection of entries which Niebuhr made in his diary during the years 1914 to 1928 when he was pastor of Bethel Church in Detroit, Michigan, a parish of the Evangelical Synod of North America, it is the most personal of his writings and thus enables one to observe his personal reactions to the First World War, to the economic policies of the Republican administrations of the 1920's, and to the labor-management problems in Detroit's auto industry. The very title of the book suggests the mood of the author in the face of the difficulties confronting him and his disillusionment with the liberal theology which he had learned at school and which is proving impotent to solve these difficulties. Moreover, Niebuhr comes more and more to consider liberalism to be hypocritical. His struggle against Henry Ford and his Ford Motor Company in behalf of Detroit's exploited auto workers is a very important factor in leading Niebuhr to this re-evaluation of liberalism. Henry Ford comes to typify for Niebuhr the hypocrisy of liberal America.¹⁹ While treating his workers like so many automatons, Henry Ford gratefully

¹⁸ Does Civilization Need Religion?, New York (1927); Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic, New York (1930); Moral Man and Immoral Society, New York (1932); An Interpretation of Christian Ethics, New York (1935). (1933), p. 33, quoted in Carter, op. cit., p. 153.

acknowledged the praise of his contemporaries for his most liberal policies toward his workers.¹⁹ The pages of Leaves are not completely monopolized by Niebuhr's struggle with the Henry Ford, however.²⁴ Certain entries, particularly in the early years, provide an insight into Niebuhr's reaction to the various historical and international events discussed in 1933, above and indicate that these events contributed to the emergence of that Niebuhrian cynicism which appears in the title of the book. Though never one of the crisis theologians, his criticism. Though these writings of Reinhold Niebuhr furnish perhaps the clearest evidence of the alienation developing between the younger generation of American theologians and their liberal heritage, they are not the only such evidence. Alongside this native American protest against liberalism and European voices are beginning to be heard. Already, before John 1930, that crisis theology which H. Richard Niebuhr had so sharply and hastily rejected as late as 1929²⁰ and for which

Reinhold Niebuhr has little good to say in An Interpretation

²³Most important among these are: Douglas Horton's trans- of Christian Ethics²¹ had begun to make sense to some young and Chicago (1928); G.W. Richard, E.G. Horinghausen and Karl J. Ernst's American theologians.²² The writings of Barth and Thurneyson New York (1933), and God's Search for Man, New York (1935). Sir Edwin Hoskins' translation of Barth's Römerbrief, London (1933), started ¹⁹June Bingham, Courage to Change: An Introduction to the Life and Thought of Reinhold Niebuhr, New York (1961) p.1302. most to influence his thought. Vide H. Richard Niebuhr, "Ex Libris," Christian ²⁰H. Richard Niebuhr, Social Sources, pp. 275-277.

²¹Reinhold Niebuhr, An Interpretation of Christian Ethics, pp.155-156. Brunner, The Theology of Crisis, New York and London (1929).

²²Writing in 1933, H.P. van Dusen says, "Many who cannot understand this strange dialectic theology know that it is saying something which they have long dimly felt." H.P. van Dusen in lin, Yearbook of the American Churches, (1933), p. 33, quoted in Carter, op. cit., p. 153.

began appearing in English translation in 1928.²³ Brunner did spent a year in America in 1929 and 1930 as visiting professor at Union Theological Seminary and lectured extensively in the country during that time.²⁴ Paul Tillich began to win influence after 1932 through H. Richard Niebuhr's translation of his Die Religiöse Lage.²⁵ He settled permanently in this country in 1933, one of the first victims of Nazi persecution. From that time on until his death he exerted a constant and growing influence on American theology. Though never one of the crisis theologians, C. H. Richard Niebuhr, 1925-1941. his critique of liberalism was at some points almost as sharp.

I. The Earliest Signs of Change: 1925-1932
D.C. Macintosh and Paul Tillich
He was particularly responsible for introducing to America Kierkegaard's existentialistic critique of idealism and for familiarizing American theological circles with the then-emerging H. Richard Niebuhr's theological development in the thirties existentialist thought of Europe. This existentialism found a and that more general theological movement away from liberalism particularly hearty welcome in America. It was taken up by John Mackey, whose inaugural address as president of Princeton Seminary, reciprocal one in which Niebuhr both influenced and was influenced shows strong influences from Kierkegaard, Unamuno, and the early by the general development of theology in America. Although no

²³Most important among these are: Douglas Horton's translation of Barth's Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie, Boston and Chicago (1928); G.W. Richard, E.G. Homrighausen and Karl J. Ernst's translation of Barth's and Thurneysen's sermons, Come, Holy Spirit, New York (1933), and God's Search for Man, New York (1935). Sir Edwin Hoskins' translation of Barth's Römerbrief, London (1933), exerted tremendous influence on both sides of the Atlantic. H. Richard Niebuhr lists it as among the ten books which did most to influence his thought. Vide H. Richard Niebuhr, "Ex Libris," Christian Century, LXXIX (1962), p. 754.

²⁴Brunner's The Theology of Crisis appeared in English in 1929. Emil Brunner, The Theology of Crisis, New York and London (1929).

²⁵Paul Tillich, The Religious Situation, New York (1932). From the German original, Die Religiöse Lage der Gegenwart, Berlin, p. 1403. (1926).

Barth,²⁶ and by Walter Lowrie, the Anglican, whose writings did so much to spread the knowledge of Kierkegaard in America.²⁷ By 1933 this many-sided attack on liberalism in America had begun to take definite shape and had become known variously as "Theological Realism," or "neo-Orthodoxy."²⁸ The result was the collapse in America of liberalism as an effective spiritual force, a collapse which by the end of the thirties was as complete as it had been in Europe ten years earlier.²⁹

Barth in a more positive manner than he had been able to do in C. H. Richard Niebuhr, 1925-1941.

his cursory remarks in *Social Sources*, 30.

1. The Earliest Signs of Change: 1925-1932

From the Social Gospel to Theological Realism: a study of D.C. Macintosh and Paul Tillich

Ernst Troeltsch under D.C. Macintosh. This was his first direct

It is now necessary to look at the relationship between experiences with the American equivalent of "Universitäts-theologie" H. Richard Niebuhr's theological development in the thirties and it is from these years that the first changes in his thought and that more general theological movement away from liberalism which led him away from liberalism are to be dated.³¹ which has been described above. This relationship was a

D.C. Macintosh, 1877-1940, a Scot who taught theology at Yale Divinity School from the early years of the twentieth century to his death in 1940, was a leading member of the school

²⁶John MacKay, The Restoration of Theology, Princeton (1937).

²⁷Walter Lowrie, Kierkegaard, London and New York (1938).

³⁰C. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Social Sources*, pp. 275-277.

²⁸The most complete treatment of this movement up to 1940 is George Hammar's Christian Realism and Contemporary American Theology, Upsala (1940). See, also, Mary Frances Thelan's Man As Sinner in Contemporary American Theology, Morningside Heights (1946).

²⁹How radical this collapse is is indicated by John Bennett's article in the 1933 Number of Christian Century. "The most important fact about contemporary American theology is the disintegration of liberalism. Disintegration may seem too strong a word, but I am using it quite literally. It means that as a structure with a high degree of unity, theological liberalism is coming to pieces." John C. Bennett, "After Liberalism--What?", Christian Century, L (1933), p. 1403.

modifications of his original liberal position can be found in any of Niebuhr's writings prior to 1925, it is, nevertheless, necessary to begin an account of his pilgrimage away from liberalism with the year 1922, since in this year he came under the influence of a theology which was eventually to set him thinking about the acceptability of a certain tendency inherent in liberalism, viz liberalism's excessive subjectivity. It is this questioning which eventually enabled him to evaluate the work of Barth in a more positive manner than he had been able to do in his cursory remarks in Social Sources.³⁰

In 1922, Niebuhr went to Yale to do his doctorate on Ernst Troeltsch under D.C. Macintosh. This was his first direct experience with the American equivalent of "Universitaetstheologie" and it is from these years that the first changes in his thought which led him away from liberalism are to be dated.³¹

D.C. Macintosh, 1877-1948, a Scot who taught theology at Yale Divinity School from the early years of the twentieth century to his death in 1948, was a leading member of the school of American realistic theology.³² Macintosh himself a liberal,

³⁰H. Richard Niebuhr, Social Sources, pp. 275-277.

³¹Niebuhr did his undergraduate work at Elmhurst College, a small denominational school in Elmhurst, Illinois. The school offered special scholarships to pastors' sons, but was not at the time an accredited institution and could not therefore award recognized BD degrees. His undergraduate theological education was, likewise, at a denominational seminary, Eden Theological Seminary, in Webster Grove, Missouri. Vide Bingham, Courage to Change, p. 62.

³²The other leading member was Henry Nelson Wieman of the Chicago University faculty of theology.

nevertheless revolted against the romantic subjectivism that of the earlier Schleiermacher-Bushnell liberal tradition which made the "God-idea" the object of theology. He asserted against this subjectivism, the ontological independence of God as the object of religion and took seriously James' recommendation to employ the empirical method in gaining knowledge of this object, believing that by means of this method a valid and proved knowledge of the existence and nature of God could be built up.³³ Macintosh outlines his empirical method in his book, Theology as Empirical Science,³⁴ and gives a succinct definition to his brand of religious realism in the preface to the collection of essays which he edited in 1931.³⁵ "Religious realism," Macintosh says there, "... means centrally the view that a religious object, such as may appropriately be called God, exists independently of our

D.C. Macintosh, op. cit., p. v.

³³By empirical method Macintosh has in mind the five methods defined by G.S. Mill, Cf. D.C. Macintosh, "Experimental Realism in Religion," in the volume, Religious Realism edited by Macintosh, New York (1931). For the more remote philosophical origins of Macintosh's realism which may reach back to Thomas Reid, the Scottish Common Sense Realist who died in 1794 and whom Kant treated with such disdain, and beyond Reid to the empiricism of John Locke, see Victor Emmanuel Harlow, Bibliography and Genetic Study of American Realism, Oklahoma City (1931); James Donald Butler, Four Philosophies and Their Practice in Education and Religion, New York (1957), and John C. Bennett, Christian Realism, New York (1942).

³⁴According to Kliever, op. cit., pp. 32-33, this criticism of liberal D.C. Macintosh, Theology as Empirical Science, New York (1919). for the first time in 1927 in the article "Theology and Psychology: A Sterile

³⁵D.C. Macintosh, Religious Realism. This book, which contained contributions from very many theologians, all of whom at that time identified themselves with religious realism, marked the high point of religious realism in America. Soon after this year, many of the contributors went independent, and sometimes quite distinct, ways from Macintosh. In H. Richard Niebuhr's contribution, "Religious Realism in the Twentieth Century," pp. 413-430, signs of his later development already appear.

consciousness...and is yet related to us in such a way that through reflection on experience in general and religious experience in particular, and without any dependence upon the familiar arguments of epistemological idealism, it is possible for us to gain...knowledge...not only that that religious object exists but, also, ...as to what its nature is."³⁶

Leaving aside most of the ontological and epistemological refinements of Macintosh's realistic position,³⁷ Niebuhr took up Macintosh's critique of subjectivism in a series of articles beginning in 1925.³⁸ In "Theology and Psychology: A Sterile Union," in which the Macintosh influence is most apparent, Niebuhr sharply criticizes the marriage between psychology and theology which was consummated, he says, when Schleiermacher

³⁶D.C. Macintosh, op. cit., p. v.

³⁷Niebuhr had an aversion to metaphysical speculation, which lasted until the end of his life. For this information I'm indebted to Mrs. James B. Harrison, assistant dean of students at Union Theological Seminary in New York City and a former student of Niebuhr's.

³⁸"Back to Benedict," Christian Century, XLII (1925), pp. 860-861; "Theology and Psychology: A Sterile Union," Christian Century, XLIV (1927), pp. 47-48; "Can German and American Christians Understand Each Other?", Christian Century, XLVIII (1930); "Religious Realism in the Twentieth Century," in D.C. Macintosh, Religious Realism, New York (1931), pp. 413-430.

According to Kliever, op. cit., pp. 32-33, this criticism of liberalism's subjectivistic or anthropocentric tendencies occurs for the first time in 1927 in the article "Theology and Psychology: A Sterile Union." Kliever is of the opinion that Macintosh and Tillich first called Niebuhr's attention to this weakness of liberalism, which Kliever calls "neo-Protestantism." It appears to me to have come more directly from Macintosh, who in turn may have called Niebuhr's attention to Tillich.

³⁹Niebuhr, "Theology and Psychology," p. 48. Niebuhr repeats this recommendation sixteen years later in "Toward a New Other Worldliness," Theology Today, 1 (1944), pp. 76-87.

introduced Kantian subjectivism into theology, thus "transferring the point of view...so that henceforth the subject displaced the object in the center of attention."³⁹ This subjectivism was introduced into America by William James⁴⁰ and continued to play an important role in American theology. This has led theology into a blind alley, resulting in the consigning of the whole realm of religious experience to psychology and in theology's loss of certainty in regard to its object. All this has tended to discredit theology as a science. Theology can be cured from this illness only if it resolutely turns its back on all "psychologism," devoting itself "with the wholeheartedness which characterizes the natural sciences to the observation and intense study of its object as it is revealed in history and in the ethical and spiritual life."⁴¹ D.C. Macintosh is named as a representative of such an anti-psychologistic theology. "Can German and American Christians Understand Each Other?", written three years later, represents basically the same critical position but in the intervening years Niebuhr has

³⁹Niebuhr, "Theology and Psychology: A Sterile Union," p. 47.

⁴⁰Here Niebuhr disagrees with Ahlstrom's opinion that it was Bushnell who introduced this tradition and that James' empiricism rather called the reaction of the realists into being. Cf. Ahlstrom, "Theology in America: A Historical Survey," in Smith and Jamison's Religion in American Life, p. 310.

⁴¹Niebuhr, "Theology and Psychology," p. 48. Niebuhr repeats this recommendation sixteen years later in "Toward a New Other Worldliness," Theology Today, I (1944), pp. 78-87.

discovered the German "religious realists," two of whom he names, Paul Tillich and Alfred Dedo Mueller.⁴² The movement which they represent he sees as parallel to the religious realism movement in America which he had discussed in the earlier article, "Theology and Psychology." Niebuhr sees, on the other hand, certain distinctions between the German religious realism of Tillich and Mueller and its American counterpart, two of the most significant of which he lists. German religious realism "is more historical in its point of view, more aware of the connection of the present with the past, and it is more objective, insofar as it gives little attention to the subject's adjustment to God and emphasizes the Divine Object's invasion of human life."⁴³ Here already is an implied criticism of Macintosh's realism which Niebuhr does not yet offer in his own name but in that of the German religious realists. Niebuhr's next utterance in favor of the cause of religious realism is his contribution to Religious Realism, the collection of essays on this subject edited by Macintosh in 1931. This article is based, as Niebuhr acknowledges in a footnote, on Tillich's work and particularly on his book, Die Religiöse Lage der Gegenwart,⁴⁴ and repeats the latter's all-out attack on the anthropocratic

⁴²Niebuhr, "Can German and American Christians Understand Each Other?", p. 915. The crisis theologians, mentioned in this article for the second time in Niebuhr's writings, are not listed as belonging to the religious realists.

⁴³Ibid., p. 916. also, First, "Niebuhr's Theological Background," in Faith and Ethics, p. 24, and Afterward, op. cit., p. 221.

⁴⁴Paul Tillich, Die Religiöse Lage der Gegenwart, Berlin (1926).

tendencies of the self-sufficient capitalistic age. It closes by listing the criticisms which Tillich directs against the realism of Macintosh and Wieman. The substance of this criticism is that American realism, by not adequately acknowledging the discontinuity between God and man, is not critical enough in its evaluation of human experience, particularly religious experience, and thus reveals itself to be too closely related to the very subjectivism which it seeks to criticize. Here Niebuhr clearly identifies himself with this Tillichian criticism of his former teacher. ⁴⁵ Finally, finally joins that of the Niebuhr's final contribution to the discussion on religious realism is his translation of and preface to Paul Tillich's Die Religiöse Lage. ⁴⁶ In his Preface, ⁴⁷ Niebuhr discusses Tillich's work under the theme "belieful realism," which he defines as the intellectual attitude emerging from the revolt against capitalistic society. ⁴⁸ Whereas capitalism had been characterized by confidence in the self-sufficiency of the human and finite world, in the "belieful realism" of the revolt, "reference to the transcendent and eternal ground of being is present."⁴⁷

Beginning in 1927, when Niebuhr first adopted Macintosh's realistic critique of liberalism's subjectivism, to 1932 by which does not occur until 1929. Indeed, even then Niebuhr mentions

⁴⁵Paul Tillich, The Religious Situation, New York (1932), translated by H. Richard Niebuhr.

⁴⁶H. Richard Niebuhr, "Theology and Psychology: A Sterile Union," Ibid., pp. vii-xxii, reprinted as "The Religious Situation," in T.S. Kepler's Contemporary Religious Thought, New York (1941), pp. 83-88. Vide also Frei, "Niebuhr's Theological Background," in Faith and Ethics, p. 34, and Kliever, op. cit., p. 23f.

⁴⁷T.S. Kepler, op. cit., p. 84.

time he had replaced Macintosh's critique with the more radical one of Tillich, there is a definite progression in Niebuhr's thought. His criticism of liberalism is becoming sharper as his adoption of the Tillichian evaluation of American realism indicates. The inner dynamic of this movement toward a more radical criticism of liberalism is Niebuhr's growing awareness of the discontinuity between God and man. This dynamic has not exhausted itself in 1932 but continues to push Niebuhr farther and farther from his liberal heritage until his critique, passing through Macintoshian and Tillichian realism, finally joins that of the crisis theologians. This final movement toward crisis theology is most observable in the years 1932 to 1934, and it is to those years and the ones immediately following that this study now turns.

2. Later Development: 1932-1941. From Theological Realism to Karl Barth and Crisis Theology

That it was Macintosh and not Barth who first directed Niebuhr's attention to the excessive subjectivism of liberalism is indicated by the fact that whereas Niebuhr took up this criticism as early as the year 1925,⁴⁸ explicitly connecting it with the name of Macintosh, his first mention of crisis theology does not occur until 1929.⁴⁹ Indeed, even then Niebuhr mentions

⁴⁸H. Richard Niebuhr, "Theology and Psychology: A Sterile Union." Niebuhr mentions Schleiermacher specifically as introducing this union to theology.

⁴⁹H. Richard Niebuhr, Social Sources, p. 278.

the crisis theology only to reject it.⁵⁰ Moreover, although Niebuhr's second reference is not quite so harsh,⁵¹ it is not until 1931, and then only with reservations, that he is able to welcome Barth's radical transfer of the center of attention in theology from the religious subject to the Object of faith.⁵² In the years after 1932, there is a remarkable change in this situation. A close look at the book reviews written by Niebuhr in the years 1932 to 1934 reveals that these years were years of intense study of crisis theology and related philosophical points of view.⁵³ Moreover, Niebuhr himself spent the year 1932 in Europe. During this time he was able to experience first hand the historical situation of that continent and to come in contact with some of the representatives published disagreement between the Niebuhr brothers. The problem of crisis theology, the proper Christian response to the Japanese aggression against China. H. Richard recommends waiting on the Lord, but a waiting filled with prayer, self-criticism, and repentance.⁵⁴ *The Grace of Doing Nothing*, Christian Century, XLIX.

⁵⁰Ibid. Here crisis theology is accused of reducing religion to "an ethical anodyne." Critique, "Must We Do Nothing?", Ibid., pp. 415-417, while agreeing with his brother, insists that such waiting.⁵¹ H. Richard Niebuhr, "Can German and American Christians Understand Each Other?", Christian Century, XLVII (1930), p. 916. Here Niebuhr is willing to admit crisis theology as a meaningful possibility--for Europe. H. Richard's reply, "A Communication: The Only Way into the Kingdom of God," Ibid., 1932. Here he defends his original.⁵² H. Richard Niebuhr, "Religious Realism in the Twentieth Century," in Religious Realism. This criticism is essentially his that of Macintosh in "Theology, Valuational or Existential." Cf. also Kliever, Christology and Methodology in H. Richard Niebuhr. Niebuhr warns in this article that Barth's refusal to relate revelation to human value cognitions may result in the arising of a new dogmatism.

⁵³Vide the list of books reviewed by him in these years. In 1932 he reviewed Pauck, Karl Barth, Prophet of A New Christianity; McConnachie, The Significance of Karl Barth; Jones, Contemporary Thought in Germany. In 1933 Lowrie, Our Concern with the Theology of Crisis; Keller, Der Weg der dialektischen Theologie durch die kirchliche Welt. In 1934 Barth and Thurneyson, Come, Holy Spirit. The list of Niebuhr's book reviews is found in Faith and Ethics, pp. 297-301, where he is severely challenged by the deteriorating international situation. Niebuhr was attempting to substitute for this false

of Barth. The result of this more intensive study and this time spent abroad began to be evident in Niebuhr's writings beginning in 1932. In that year a series of articles appeared in which the gospel was interpreted primarily in terms of the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone.⁵⁴ Niebuhr continued this emphasis on the role of faith in the life of the Christian in 1933 and 1934 with the articles, "Nationalism, Socialism, and Christianity"⁵⁵ and "What Then Must We Do?"⁵⁶ The key role assigned to the concept of faith in these post-1932 articles is in contrast with earlier writings, particularly

Social Sources, and is a result--at least in part--of the growth confidence in human progress, tested and found wanting, a somewhat more traditional interpretation of the gospel based upon confidence in God.⁵⁴ "The Grace of Doing Nothing," Christian Century, XLIX (1932), pp. 378-380. This article was the occasion of the only published disagreement between the Niebuhr brothers. The problem under discussion is the proper Christian response to the Japanese aggression against China. H. Richard recommends waiting on the Lord, but a waiting filled with prayer, self-criticism, and repentance. Such an attitude prepares the way for the coming of God's Kingdom. Reinhold in his critique, "Must We Do Nothing?", Ibid., pp. 415-417, while agreeing with his brother, insists that such waiting, though appropriate, is not sufficient. It reflects idealism and apocalyptic enthusiasm, and must be modified by a program of action which compromises with the reality of the historical situation. The exchange closes with H. Richard's reply, "A Communication: The Only Way into the Kingdom of God," Ibid., 1932. Here he defends his original position, accusing his brother of "hopeless compromise," and pointing out that the basic issue involved between him and his brother is the understanding of history. ⁵⁵H. Richard Niebuhr, "Nationalism, Socialism, and Christianity," World Tomorrow, XVI (1933), pp. 469-470. ⁵⁶H. Richard Niebuhr, "What Then Must We Do?", Christian Century Pulpit, V (1934), pp. 145-147. This is a sermon in which several themes which are to be very important in Niebuhr's later and most mature period appear for the first time. All these articles, and this sermon particularly, reflect the historical crises of the 1930's. The confidence with which certain circles in American Protestantism had pursued the ideals of peace and brotherhood on earth was being severely challenged by the deteriorating international situation. Niebuhr was attempting to substitute for this false

of Barthian influences in Niebuhr's thought.⁵⁷

In these writings from 1932 to 1934, emphasizing the doctrine of justification by faith, Niebuhr continues along with most of his American colleagues his movement away from that liberalism which he had earlier accepted, the remnants of which had continued into the Thirties. The year 1934 was a critical one in the development of the American protest against liberalism,⁵⁸ and it is after this year that the sharpness of Niebuhr's critique of liberalism drastically increases and that still more Barthian elements appear. The

confidence in human progress, tested and found wanting, a somewhat more traditional interpretation of the gospel based upon confidence in God and His action rather than man and his works. The little article, "The Inconsistency of the Majority," *World Tomorrow*, XVII, pp. 43-44, belongs to this group of writings also. It is a criticism of the policy of the pacifist "Fellowship of Reconciliation." This fellowship does not advocate a truly Christian pacifism, since it chooses for its goals certain humanistic ideals in which it puts its confidence and chooses pacifism as the best means for arriving at these goals out of purely utilitarian considerations. Thus it exhibits, both in the ends which it sets itself and in the means by which it hopes to arrive at these ends, that same confidence in human reason and action which its non-pacifistic opponents show. A truly Christian pacifism, on the other hand, must be based not upon faith in the means and ends available to man, but in the ends set and the means employed by God and must express itself not in non-violent resistance to evil but in total non-resistance.

⁵⁷To be sure, Niebuhr acknowledges the doctrine of justification by faith alone in *Social Sources* saying, "At the end, if not at the beginning, of every effort to incorporate Christianity there is, therefore, a compromise and the Christian cannot escape the necessity of seeking the last source of righteousness outside himself and the world in the divine aggression in a justification that is by faith." *Social Sources*, p. 5. Nevertheless, the whole thrust of the book is toward stimulating Christian action. One is left with the impression that Niebuhr wrote the above only grudgingly and because the weight of personal and historical experience compelled him to do so.

⁵⁸Smith and Jamison, *Religion in American Life*, IV, p.1087.

article, "Man the Sinner,"⁵⁹ attacks liberalism's doctrine of sin as superficial, unrealistic, and unbiblical. Neither the moralistic nor psychological definition of sin so popular since in liberalism suffices to explain what is meant by this term. Only a religious explanation which finds the roots of sin in the radical perversion of man's will and faces the cosmic dimensions of the results of this perversion does justice to the gospel and to experience.⁶⁰

The most Barthian of all Niebuhr's writings, however, is the symposium, The Church Against the World, which appeared in 1935 and of which he was co-editor and contributor.⁶¹ Smith and Jamison call this work "one of the most impressive manifestations of the new school."⁶² "The Question of the Church," which employs the very language of crisis theology, is "What must we do to be saved?"⁶³ The question is addressed not to

⁵⁹H. Richard Niebuhr, "Man the Sinner," Journal of Religion, XI (1935), pp. 272-280.

⁶⁰This radical interpretation of sin came to be such a hallmark of the American revolt against liberalism that Mary Frances Thelan made it the hermeneutical key for her work on this revolt. Mary Frances Thelan, Man as Sinner in Contemporary American Theology, Morningside Heights, New York (1946). The second part of Chapter 6 discusses H. Richard Niebuhr's contribution to this redefinition of sin.

⁶¹H. Richard Niebuhr, F. Miller, W. Pauck, The Church Against the World, Chicago, New York (1935). Niebuhr wrote the opening essay, "The Question of the Church," pp. 1-13, and the closing one, "Toward the Independence of the Church," pp. 132-156. The latter article was reprinted as "Toward the Emancipation of the Church," in Christendom, I, (1935-1936), pp. 133-145.

⁶²Smith and Jamison, Religion in American Life, IV, p. 1089.

⁶³H. Richard Niebuhr, The Church Against the World, p. 1.

isolated individuals but to the Church as a community and arises as a result of the profound crisis into which both Church and world have fallen and which threatens the very existence of both Church and world. What must the church do to be saved vis-a-vis this crisis? The answer is proposed in the closing of the symposium, "Toward the Independence of the Church."⁶⁴ The crisis of the Church, viewed from the standpoint of faith, arose not so much as a result of the Church's failure to adjust to the world but because she compromised too often and too much. As a result of these compromises she has fallen into captivity to capitalism, nationalism, and anthropocentrism.⁶⁵ Anthropocentrism, however, characterized by the rejection of belief in creation, original sin, and redemption through the suffering of the innocent, is the most pervading and dangerous enemy and the one against which the major thrust of the article is directed. ^{thought makes} ^{intelligible} To be saved the Church must revolt against all forms of anthropocentrism, but she must do so on her own and with her own gospel as the basis. She must not align herself with any of the secular revolts which are directed against the world or the Church, but, acting on the basis of her own faith, she must free herself from captivity to the anthropocentrism dominant all around and in

⁶⁴Niebuhr, Miller, Pauck, The Church Against the World, pp. 123-156.

⁶⁵H. Richard Niebuhr, The Church Against the World, p. 150.

⁶⁵The attack on capitalism and nationalism is retained from Social Sources and earlier writing but the addition of anthropocentrism to the list of offenders shows clearly the influence of European thought, particularly Tillich and the crisis theologians. It is also significant that anthropocentrism is here considered the major enemy, with capitalism and nationalism seen as two forms which anthropocentrism takes in history.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, p. 150.

her. Only so can she be saved or be in a position to help the world be saved.

This revolt against anthropocentrism must be theocentric in nature since "there is no flight out of the captivity of the Church save into the captivity of God,"⁶⁶ and since "the last appeal beyond all finite principalities and powers must soon be made. It cannot be an appeal to the rights of men, of nations, or religions, but only an appeal to the right of God."⁶⁷ This revolt cannot be theocentric without at the same time being Christocentric, however, since "the appeal to the right of God means for the Church an appeal to the right of Jesus Christ."⁶⁸ Finally, the revolt must be both theological and a grass-roots movement. It must be theological because "the self-evident truths and the original loyalties of the Church can be recaptured and reaffirmed...only...as the labor of thought makes intelligible and clear the vague and general perceptions we receive from life."⁶⁹ It must be a grass-roots movement because "repentance and faith working in the rank and file of the Church are the preconditions of its independence and renewal."⁷⁰

The Barthian emphasis on theocentricism, Christocentrism, and judgment of a Church and world in crisis so dominate in this "critique and the way in which, on the one hand, they combine with Revelation. Reading backwards from the book, one might have predicted the turn which Niebuhr made in it, but one would have needed

⁶⁶H. Richard Niebuhr, The Church Against the World, p. 150.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 151. "Niebuhr's Theological Background" in

⁶⁸Ibid.,

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 153. "The Attack Upon the Social Gospel,"

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 156.

and supplement Niebuhr's own early prophetic attack on capitalism and nationalism, which he himself had adopted from Rauschenbusch, should be clear from the above summary of this 1935 symposium. Moreover, the relationship between this 1935 position and his early pre-1930 criticism of subjectivism in theology should be clear. The Kingdom of God in America The Barthian influence on Niebuhr was at its high point in this symposium and soon thereafter began to diminish. It was not until after the publication in 1941 of The Meaning of Revelation,⁷¹ however, the theological declaration of independence with which Niebuhr ushered in his last and most original theological period, that a genuinely new and typically Niebuhrian theology began to be elaborated in a coherent system. That final Niebuhrian synthesis will be the subject of Chapter V of this essay.⁷² Meanwhile, works continued to appear in which the Barthian influence remained dominate.⁷³ Among these are "The Attack Upon the Social Gospel,"⁷⁴ "The Christian Evangel

⁷¹H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, New York (1941), reprinted as Macmillan paperback in 1960.

⁷²Certain articles published by Niebuhr in the late Thirties and particularly the sermons, "What Then Must We Do?", Christian Century Pulpit, V (1934), pp. 145-147, and "Life Is Worth Living," in Intercollegian and Far Horizons, LVII (1939), pp. 3-4, 22, seem to prefigure some of the themes developed in The Meaning of Revelation. Reading backwards from the book, one might have predicted the turn which Niebuhr made in it, but one would have needed prophetic insight.

⁷³Cf. Hans Frei, "Niebuhr's Theological Background" in Faith and Ethics, p. 11.

⁷⁴H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Attack Upon the Social Gospel," Religion in Life, (1936), pp. 176-181.

and Social Culture,"⁷⁵ and "The Christian and the World's Crisis."⁷⁶ Most important among this group of works are "Value Theory and Theology," a critique of Macintoshian realism which, along with Macintosh's reply, furnishes the best indication of Niebuhr's theological development from 1932 to 1937 and Niebuhr's second book, The Kingdom of God in America.⁷⁷ In "Value Theory and Theology," Niebuhr's contribution to the Macintosh Festschrift which he co-edited,⁷⁸ Niebuhr turns the attack which Macintosh had directed against subjectivism in his Theology as Empirical Science⁷⁹ against Macintosh himself. Pointing out that the valuational theology which Macintosh represents in his 1931 article, "Experimental Realism in Religion,"⁸⁰ "assumes that men have a knowledge of absolutely valid values which is not only independent of their knowledge of God but which is also in some way determinative of

⁷⁵H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Christian Evangel and Social Culture," Religion in Life, VIII (1939), pp. 44-49.

⁷⁶H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Christian and the World's Crisis," Christianity and Society, VI (1941), pp. 11-17.

⁷⁷H. Richard Niebuhr, The Kingdom of God in America, New York (1937). Reprinted as a Harper Torchbook in 1959. German translation, Der Gedanke des Gottesreichs im Amerikanischen Christentum, New York (1948).

⁷⁸Bixler, Calhoun, Niebuhr, The Nature of Religious Experience: Essays in Honor of D.C. Macintosh, New York (1937). Niebuhr's article appears on pp. 93-116.

⁷⁹D.C. Macintosh, Theology as Empirical Science.

⁸⁰D.C. Macintosh, Religious Realism, pp. 307-412.

God."⁸¹ Niebuhr proceeds to criticize this assumption on the basis of its scientific, philosophic, and religious inadequacies. Scientifically, the empirical sciences achieved their success by abandoning their interested approach for a disinterested one which looked at the objects of investigation as they were in themselves and not as they possess value for the observer. Valuational theology, however, from Kant to Wieman and Macintosh through Schleiermacker and Ritschl has not followed this example of the empirical sciences. Rather than attempting to look at God as He is in and for himself, it has sought Him for the sake of His benefits. The consequences of this interested theological approach offer evidence of its scientific inadequacy. It comes frequently into conflict with the natural sciences because of its tendency to interpret all things teleologically; it loses its independence as a discipline and must depend on the prevailing ethical system, feeling itself obliged to demonstrate, "the usefulness of religion and of God for man's search for security, justice, or the greatest happiness of the greatest number, for his endeavors to maintain his spiritual personality in conflict with nature or for his attempt to realize the transcendental values of truth, beauty and

⁸¹In "Experimental Realism in Religion" Macintosh names as 'criteria for divine reality' certain divine attributes, such as "rationality and beauty and goodness of personal life." These ideals are for him not only, "qualitatively" divine in the sense that they are worthy...of our supreme and absolute reverence and devotion; it is also true that only as including them somehow could there be to justly claimed for any being our absolute allegiance, worship and trust." Macintosh, op. cit., p. 96. Years later in The Meaning of Revelation.

goodness."⁸²

Such valuational theology is religiously unsatisfactory because by making God a means to an end it confounds worship and because, falling into religionism, it loves the love of God more than God Himself and prizes religion as an intrinsically valuable thing and a promoter of the common good. Finally, it tries to get behind the individual religions to a general religion available equally to all men. This attempt, however, ignores the "principle of individuality" in religion and what is created is therefore religiously entirely unsatisfactory.⁸³ Here, again, Niebuhr accuses Macintosh's critique of the subjectivity of liberal theology of being inadequate to accomplish its own purpose of directing attention away from the religious subject to the religious object. Thus, the objective empirical theology for which Macintosh calls is shown to be impossible under the Macintosh presupposition; i.e., truly objective empirical theology cannot be reconciled with valuational theology.

⁸²H. Richard Niebuhr, "Value Theory and Theology" in The Nature of Religious Experience: Essays in Honor of D.C. Macintosh, p. 100. Here the second mark of liberalism discussed in Chapter II comes directly under attack.

⁸³In "Value Theory and Theology," p. 195, Niebuhr writes: "Religion...remains stubbornly individual. Judaism, Christianity, Islam...are directed toward a particular God Who revealed Himself in an individual event or in particular events. Universal validity is claimed for these revelations not because of their correspondence to some system of valid values previously discovered by men, but because they are revelations of the universal power and reality to which man and his values are required to conform." Niebuhr developed this position more systematically five years later in The Meaning of Revelation. (1904), p. 83.

In the third place Niebuhr attacks the philosophical inadequacies of Macintosh's valuational theology. These inadequacies stem from the dogmatism of many of the ethical systems on which this theology is based. One cannot avoid dogmatism to be sure, Niebuhr admits, but here a false, purely philosophical dogmatism has invaded theology's own proper realm, setting itself up as the criterion of acceptable theology. This foreign philosophical dogmatism of valuational theology is clearly seen in its practice of taking certain recognized human values as the "final values of reality." In doing this, the valuational theology shows that it does not take the principle of value relativity seriously. Wieman's definition of God as "that in the universe which will yield maximum security and increase of human good"⁸⁴ is the most evident example of this metaphysical absolutizing of human values which are then worshipped as "God." Considering the conflicts and tragedies which occur within the realm of human values itself, however, it is extremely questionable whether any such continuity as that postulated by Macintosh and Wieman exists between divine and human values.

⁸⁵The word "dialectic" itself does not occur in this article. Each of these three criticisms of Macintosh in "Value Theory and Theology" reveals the essentially Barthian orientation is in *The Kingdom of God in America*, p. xiv. This book appeared which Niebuhr's theology had assumed after 1932. The motif which underlies all three of these criticisms is Niebuhr's increasing

⁸⁶P.C. Macintosh, "Theology: Valuational or Existential?", emphasis on the infinite distance between God and the world.

Because of this infinite gulf, the rationalistic theology of the first time. It is the difference in the two men's understanding of this word and the difference in the roles played by revelation in their

⁸⁴Nelson Wieman, Wrestle of Religion with Truth, Chicago (1904), p. 89.

of Macintosh is not appropriate to its object and must be replaced by a dialectical theology which more adequately reflects the profound brokenness of the relationship between Creator and creature.⁸⁵ Moreover, only such a theology preserves God's absolute precedence in all human thought and activity.

Macintosh is quite aware of the direction in which Niebuhr is moving and of the influences under which he has fallen. In his reply to the Festschrift contribution he states that Niebuhr has in recent years been deeply influenced by Kierkegaard, Barth, Brunner, and Unamuno.⁸⁶ For Macintosh the fundamental characteristic of their existential theology is an irrationalism which, refusing to justify revelation's claim by a rational criterion, demands fideistic assent to the revelation and builds upon this assent a dogmatic structure which is to be neither defended nor questioned,⁸⁷ but merely accepted and repeated. Such a theology is for Macintosh impossible and, as the article shows, a meaningful dialogue between theologians who hold such entirely different Weltanschauungen and whose

⁸⁵The word "dialectic" itself does not occur in this article, but the principle of discontinuity is pitted against the easy continuity between human and divine of the valuational theologians. The first use of the word "dialectical" by Niebuhr is in The Kingdom of God in America, p. xiv. This book appeared in 1937, the same year in which "Value Theory and Theology" was published.

⁸⁶D.C. Macintosh, "Theology: Valuational or Existential?", Review of Religion, XXVI (1939), pp. 23-44.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 35. Here the word "revelation" occurs for the first time. It is the difference in the two men's understanding of this word and the difference in the roles played by revelation in their respective theologies which is at the root of the disagreement.

experiences of reality obviously deviate so radically can be carried on only with the greatest difficulty.

This discussion between Macintosh and Niebuhr, centering around Niebuhr's contribution to the Festschrift and Macintosh's reply, indicates as clearly as anything the development of Niebuhr's theology in the years 1929 to 1937. The position of "Value Theory and Theology" is in strong contrast to that of eight years earlier. Macintosh was the bridge for Niebuhr between the liberalism of his earliest years and the dialectical orientation of his middle period. But, in 1937, having arrived at the other side of the theological divide, Niebuhr no longer had need for that bridge. His critique of liberalism, which began as an adaptation of Macintosh's realistic critique of its epistemological idealism and religious subjectivism, had broadened into an attack upon all anthropocentric elements of liberal theology, attaching itself first to Tillich's challenge of the anthropocentric self-sufficiency of the capitalistic world and then to Barth's broad attack on the line of development coming from Schleiermacher. Finally, from this Barthian position, Niebuhr turns back against Macintosh, the very man first responsible for directing Niebuhr into this critical path but whom he, in 1937, sees along with Wieman, as standing himself at the end of that liberal movement which began with Kant and continued with Schleiermacher and Ritschl to end with Macintosh and Wieman.⁸⁸ This represents a considerable departure from the

⁸⁸H. Richard Niebuhr, "Value Theory and Theology," p. 99.

position of the Social Sources where he interpreted the gospel as the "ideals of the Nazarene,"⁸⁹ ideals which were rationally definable, and believed that man could go a long way toward the realization of these ideals on earth.⁹⁰

This theological development opens Niebuhr's eyes to understand the history of Christianity, particularly American Christianity, differently than he had understood it in The Social Sources of Denominationalism in America published in 1929.⁹¹ Firstly, his new theological perspective enables him to see that, whereas the thesis of that book is not entirely

wrong, there are, nevertheless, certain important characteristics of the religious stream in America which cannot be

entirely explained by the sociological approach employed there.⁹²

Moreover, Niebuhr's new theological position has caused him to consider the answer which he gave to the problem of denominationalism an answer given "in the form of a new appeal to goodwill to confidence in the theology of the Social Gospel, but it is impossible to overcome stubborn social divisions and to incarnate the ideals of

among men, all of which tended to undermine this confidence. Moreover, Niebuhr's interest in the evangelical movement seems to have lessened.⁸⁹ H. Richard Niebuhr, Social Sources, p. 279.ected a number of criticisms against the direction which the movement was taking, appearing⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 283-284. of a reurgent ecclesiasticism.

Carter discusses the impact of the European criticisms directed at the American⁹¹ Niebuhr acknowledges his dissatisfaction with Social Sources in the Preface to The Kingdom of God in America, the last of his works written under the Barthian total eclipse. also after

Lausanne that Richard and Reinhold Niebuhr began to be heard from as, in effect,⁹² The sociological approach accounted for (a) the channels in which the religious stream flowed but not for the flow itself; and (b) was relevant to the institutionalized churches but not to the movement which produced these churches; (c) explained the diversity of American religion but not the unity which persisted in spite of that diversity; and (d) was relevant to a culturally dependent World faith but not to the prophetic anti-cultural faith which appeared from time to time in the history of religion in America. Design.

Jesus" to be "wholly inadequate."⁹³

The result of Niebuhr's dissatisfaction with the thesis and solution of Social Sources was a renewed study of the history of American Christianity, a study which resulted in the publication of The Kingdom of God in America. At first he took as his hermeneutical principle for this study the idea of the Kingdom of God on earth, a theme suggested to him by Adolf Keller, Heinrich Frick, and a number of participants at the Stockholm Conference of Life and Works, as the major theme of American Christianity.⁹⁴ In confrontation with

⁹³H. Richard Niebuhr, The Kingdom of God in America, p. x.

⁹⁴It would be interesting to trace the influence of the ecumenical movement on Niebuhr's thought. His first specific reference to the movement occurs in "Can German and American Christians Understand Each Other?", Christian Century, (1930), p. 914. Here it is likewise the Stockholm Life and Work Conference which is mentioned for the strong criticism which it directed against the American understanding of the term "Kingdom of God." Certainly Niebuhr's ecumenical contacts contributed to the shaking of his confidence in the theology of the Social Gospel, but it is impossible to say to what extent, since these contacts were only one factor among many, all of which tended to undermine this confidence. Moreover, Niebuhr's interest in the ecumenical movement seems to have lessened in the years after the war. Indeed, he directed a number of criticisms against the direction which the movement was taking, appearing particularly afraid of a resurgent ecclesiasticism. Carter discusses the impact of the European criticism directed at the American participants in the Stockholm and Lausanne Conferences of 1925, Carter, op. cit., pp. 109-121. This critique began to be known in America after Lausanne and, as Carter says, "It was also after Lausanne that Richard and Reinhold Niebuhr began to be heard from as, in effect, mediators between the European theologians and their own countrymen." Carter, op. cit., p. 118. Neither Reinhold nor Richard Niebuhr are listed among the participants at Lausanne, however.

Richard Niebuhr's first direct contact with the ecumenical movement seems to have been in Evanston in 1958, though he prepared an article for a study commission for the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam. H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Disorder of Man in the Church of God," in Man's Disorder and God's Design.

the actual history of religion in America, however, this hermeneutical device proved insufficient since the theme "Kingdom of God on Earth" was dominate only in the last period of the religious history of America. On the other hand, Niebuhr believed to have discovered an inner, organic relationship between this period and the two preceding ones. The theme, "The Kingdom of God," was, indeed, the red thread woven through the whole fabric of American religious history, but it had meant different things at different times. In the earliest period it had meant "sovereignty of God" and in the period of the Great Awakening it had meant "Kingdom of Christ." Only in the nineteenth century had it come to mean predominately "Kingdom of God on earth."

It is at this point in his search for a new and more adequate understanding of the history of American religion that Niebuhr turned to the insights of Bergson and Barth.⁹⁵ It is his application of Barthian insights in Kingdom of God which will be discussed here.⁹⁶

⁹⁵Niebuhr mentions these two names in the Preface to Kingdom of God, p. xii.

⁹⁶The Bergsonian influence cannot be extensively treated in this dissertation. It must suffice to point out that Bergson's book, Les Deux Sources de La Moralite et de La Religion, Paris (1932), English translation by R.A. Auden and C. Brereton, New York (1935), is the source of this influence. Its primary manifestation is the consistent distinction which Niebuhr makes in Kingdom of God between Christianity as an institution and Christianity as a movement. This distinction is inspired by Bergson's contrast between a static and a dynamic religion, Bergson, op. cit., pp. 92-178. The Christianity with which Niebuhr is concerned in The Kingdom of God is the movement, in contrast to Social Sources, where attention is focused upon the institution.

Two specifically Barthian motifs appearing in earlier works by Niebuhr, as well as the Barthian tone of The Church Against the World and the Barthian elements in his criticism of Macintosh, have been discussed above. The Barthian influence in The Kingdom of God is considerably more diffuse and subtle and, therefore, difficult to identify. It effects the book rather as a leaven, the hidden influence of which permeates the whole, showing itself now and again in specific formulations. Nevertheless, that this influence is there--or Niebuhr thinks it is there--is evident from his remarks in the Preface.⁹⁷ An attempt must be made, therefore, to determine the points at which this influence shows itself.

Whereas Niebuhr was asserting in 1929, "The denominations, churches, and sects are sociological groups whose principle of differentiation is to be sought in their conformity to the order of social classes and casts,"⁹⁸ in 1937 he emphasized against the sociologists, with particular reference to Marxists⁹⁹ and, also, against himself, "the sociological interpretation...is unsatisfactory as a complete explanation."¹⁰⁰ To be sure, the "complete" must be emphasized, since Niebuhr in no sense denies

⁹⁷Niebuhr, The Kingdom of God, p. xii.

⁹⁸Niebuhr, Social Sources, p. 25.

⁹⁹Ibid., pp. 4, 7, 190.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 12.

that sociological forces have played an important role in the development of denominationalism in America. Nevertheless, his position on this point is distinctly different in 1937 from that of 1929. His intention now is to prove from historical investigations that religion in America, far from being an absolutely passive factor determined by economic and sociological forces, has often been a dynamic and aggressive force influencing, and sometimes determining, economic and sociological developments. Whereas Niebuhr makes grateful use of Bergson's study, Les Deux Sources de La Moralite' et Religion, to support his thesis,¹⁰¹ the mood and the point of departure for the study is essentially Barthian. The mood is that of a prophet defending the integrity of his vocation.¹⁰² The point of departure is a somewhat indignant rejection of the dogmatic "this-worldliness" of the sociological approach as an absolute hermeneutical principle.¹⁰³ Against this approach which makes of Christianity an "epiphenomenon,"¹⁰⁴

Niebuhr declares war, insisting on the legitimacy of a strictly theological approach which, in "seeking to understand the relation of American Christianity to American culture, makes the former of God, p. xlv. This is the first use of the word "dialectical" in Niebuhr's writings. The principle of discontinuity is enunciated in debate

¹⁰¹Ibid., pp. 6, 9, 11, 165, 199, 209. Cf. above.

¹⁰²On page 9 of Kingdom of God Niebuhr writes, "It is difficult, if not impossible, to fit Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Jesus, Paul, Francis of Assisi, Martin Luther, and 'many another' prophet into a system of faith determined by social factors."

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 4.

rather than the latter our starting point."¹⁰⁵

A second, and more obviously Barthian, characteristic of The Kingdom of God is the dialectical method explicitly adopted by Niebuhr in his Preface. This method is necessary, he insists, because of the distance separating God from man--the sinner, and from the fallen creation. It is only by employing such a dialectical method that the theologian can avoid offending against the transcendence and sovereignty of God.¹⁰⁶ Liberalism, failing to recognize both this transcendent sovereignty and the brokenness of the divine-human relationship, believed itself to be in a position to speak directly about the mysteries of the Godhead. For this presumption, Niebuhr attacks it in The Kingdom of God. The theology of early America, that of the Puritan fathers, as well as much of that of the Great Awakening,¹⁰⁷ on the other hand, is praised for its emphasis on transcendence expressed in the doctrines of the divine sovereignty, election,

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁰⁶ "The relation of God to the world which is infinitely dependent upon Him...to a fallen world which remains the object of His redeeming love, requires of those who seek to be obedient to the divine imperative a dialectical movement." Niebuhr, The Kingdom of God, p. xiv. This is the first use of the word "dialectical" in Niebuhr's writings. The principle of discontinuity is enunciated in debate with Macintosh over the Festschrift. Cf. above.

¹⁰⁷ Particularly, Jonathan Edwards. Vide the many references to him in The Kingdom of God.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., pp. 17-18. This evaluation of the tradition is opposite to that of liberal theology.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 141. The harshness of this attack is expressed most succinctly in a sentence on page 193. According to liberal theology, "a God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross."

and predestination.¹⁰⁸ Pages 191-198, with which Niebuhr closes the book, read like a Barthian indictment of neo-Protestantism and a Barthian call to return to the true Protestantism of Luther, Calvin, and their legitimate successors, among whom are the Puritan divines--above all--Jonathan Edwards. The unique mark of the liberalism here under attack is its failure to realize the absolute nature of God's sovereignty. This failure results in an inability to understand or rightly evaluate the Puritan or Edwardian theological heritage.

The New England doctrines of divine election and grace have fallen away and a romantic, evolutionary conception of the Kingdom of God and its coming has been substituted for the revolutionary one of the gospels. This liberal idea of the Kingdom eliminated all tragedies, sacrifices, and discontinuities. Indeed, the cross and resurrection were themselves eliminated. This liberalism "reconciled God and man by deifying the latter and humanizing the former."¹⁰⁹ Nor did this liberalism achieve its purpose of establishing the Kingdom of God on earth. Rather, like its predecessors, it was institutionalized and came to an end as an effective religious movement. From the history of this liberalism's

¹⁰⁸Ibid., pp. 24, 84. This evaluation of the tradition is opposite to that of Social Sources.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 191. The harshness of this attack is expressed most succinctly in a sentence on page 193. According to liberal theology, "a God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross."

failure it may be concluded that "the ideal of the coming kingdom, divorced from reliance on the divine initiative and separated from the experience of the Christian revolution" is inadequate.¹¹⁰

This discussion of the themes which gained the mastery in Niebuhr writings of the 1930's should show the increase of Barthian influence during those years, an influence which reached its height in 1935 in Niebuhr's contributions to The Church Against the World, but which continued to dominate the two important writings of 1937, "Value Theory and Theology" and The Kingdom of God in America.¹¹¹ In these writings, however, and particularly in the former, the beginnings of a reaction against Barthianism can be seen--but this is the subject of the next chapter of this study. First, another important influence effecting Niebuhr in the 1930's must be discussed.

3. The Great Tradition

In an article written for Christian Century in 1960,¹¹² Niebuhr describes his theological development of the past thirty years declaring, "the Thirties were for me...the decisive period in the formulation of basic personal convictions."¹¹³ He later

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 197.

¹¹¹Cf. Frei, Faith and Ethics, p. 11.

¹¹²H. Richard Niebuhr, "Reformation: Continuing Imperative," Christian Century, LXXVII (1960), pp. 248-251.

¹¹³Ibid., p. 248.

informs the reader that one influence in this decisive period was the "Great Tradition,"¹¹⁴ to which he, along with a great number of his theological colleagues, turned back in those years. As a part of this "Great Tradition," Niebuhr names "Edwards, Pascal, Luther, Calvin, Thomas, and Augustine."¹¹⁵

The effect of this turning back can be observed by comparing the treatment of Luther, Calvin, and Edwards in Social Sources with the treatment of these same men in The Kingdom of God. In the former, Niebuhr's interest in the work of the two reformers is largely historical and he assumes a rather critical attitude. Edwards is mentioned only once.

In Kingdom of God, Niebuhr's interest in these men is primarily theological and they are portrayed as champions of the faith which had been betrayed by their followers in succeeding generations. The praise of Edwards is sounded particularly loudly and long, with no fewer than fourteen separate references to him occurring.

Besides Edwards, Luther and Calvin, among the figures listed as belonging to the "Great Tradition," play a large role, although Niebuhr's relationship to Calvin seems somewhat less

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 249.

¹¹⁵Ibid., Niebuhr does not say whether this turning back to the "Great Tradition" occurred under the impact of Barth's work which, as is often forgotten, included important historical studies in which a thorough going re-evaluation of the theological tradition was undertaken, or was an independent development. I believe that his discovery of crisis theology is not unrelated to his rediscovery of the "Great Tradition" and his new, more positive, relationship to it.

direct, being mediated through Edwards whom some scholars consider to be Calvin's most creative disciple.¹¹⁶ References to Luther indicate that he influenced the growing emphasis which Niebuhr placed on faith as the central reality of Christian existence.¹¹⁷ The theme of the sovereignty of God, which came to play an increasingly important part in his later theology, was mediated to him primarily through the Calvinism of Jonathan Edwards.¹¹⁸ The corollary to this doctrine of the Divine Sovereignty, also mediated through Edwards, is Niebuhr's view of all human and cultural values as relative.¹¹⁹

Thus, it can be seen that the "Great Tradition" toward which Niebuhr turned in the 1930's worked to awaken in him three convictions which he says he arrived at at that time and which remained central in his later development, contributing significantly to the Niebuhrian synthesis which began to emerge

¹¹⁶Cf. Perry Miller's introduction to Edwards, A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections.

¹¹⁷Cf. Niebuhr's sermon, "The Nature and Existence of God," Motive, IV, pp. 13-15, 43-46, reprinted in Faber's edition of Radical Monotheism and Western Culture as "Faith in Gods and In God," pp. 114-126. Vide especially pp. 119-122; Niebuhr, "Life Is Worth Living," Intercollegian and Far Horizons, LVII (1939), pp. 3-4, 22; The Meaning of Revelation, p. 28. In later articles such as "The Ego-alter Dialectic and the Conscious," Journal of Philosophy, XLII (1945), pp. 352-359, and "The Triad of Faith," Andover Newton Bulletin, XLVII (1954), pp. 3-12, this theme on faith, which is earlier announced with reference to Luther, is developed without specific mention of the reformer.

¹¹⁸Niebuhr, Kingdom of God, p. 101. Vide also J.M. Gustafson's Introduction to The Responsible Self, New York (1963), p. 26.

¹¹⁹Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, p. 105, note 5.

after 1941. These three convictions are (a) that God is sovereign, (b) that men are hopelessly lost in sin and idolatry, and (c) that "trust in the ground of being is a miraculous gift."¹²⁰

CHAPTER FOUR: THE DRIFT AWAY FROM BARTH'S

With this brief discussion of Niebuhr's rediscovery of the "Great Tradition," this consideration of his middle period dominated by the figure of Barth can be concluded.¹²¹

1. Introduction

¹²⁰H. Richard Niebuhr, "Reformation: Continuing Imperative," pp. 248-249.

¹²¹It should be pointed out that Niebuhr, even in the Thirties, rejected the label "Barthian." Cf. "Reformation: Continuing Imperative," p. 248. Nor is it the intention of this essay to attach a label to Niebuhr which he himself rejected. Nevertheless, the themes which occur and re-occur in his works during those years are to a large extent the themes which were so dramatically announced in the second edition of Barth's Roemerbrief and continued by Barth in many of his early sermons and essays. Moreover, it must be considered significant that Niebuhr, in response to a query of Christian Century in 1962, the last year of his life, listed Barth's Epistle to the Romans as among the ten books which did most to influence his thought. H. Richard Niebuhr, "Ex Libris," Christian Century, LXXIX (1962), p. 754. Furthermore, Niebuhr admits, "In the early 1930's I had to give up my connection with that ethics-and-religion-centered way of thinking about God and man, which is roughly called liberal and...I had affiliated myself with the movement variously called dialectical theology, theology of crisis, neo-orthodoxy, and Barthianism." H. Richard Niebuhr, "Reformation: Continuing Imperative," p. 248.

¹H. R. Niebuhr, "What Then Must We Do?", Christian Century Exhibit, V (1934), pp. 145-147.

²Eighteen hundred and thirty-two is a crucial year in the development of the theology of Barth, the year in which die Kirchliche Dogmatik I appeared.

³Niebuhr refers specifically to "the storm of war that is even now gathering upon the horizon." Ibid., p. 145.

⁴Ibid., p. 147.

however, Niebuhr includes a reference to the true object of faith in terms of Exodus 3:4. Faith is to be based upon the "I am that I am," that is, "...the last reality which is our creator and

CHAPTER FOUR: THE DRIFT AWAY FROM BARTH'S THEOLOGY OF THE WORD

A. Growing Importance of the Concept of "Faith" in Niebuhr's Writings

1. Introduction

Continuing to expound on this theme of faith in 1939 in the article "Life is Worth Living,"⁴ Niebuhr introduces a new element, gained from the writings of Leo Tolstoy, into his inter-using hindsight, furnishes a key to the gradual emergence of pretation of faith as a dynamic life force. Quoting from Tolstoy's a strand in his thought which would tend to distinguish him My Confession,⁷ Niebuhr points to faith as "...knowledge of the more and more from Barth's post-1932 theology.² In this sermon, meaning of life in consequence of which man does not destroy him- Niebuhr begins a consideration of the concept "faith," a concept self but lives. Faith is the force of life.⁶ From this time on, which would come to play an increasingly important role in his references to Tolstoy are frequent--always--with the exception of theology. In answer to the question "What then must we do?",³ a the long section on him in Christ and Culture,⁵ in sections of his question the urgency of which is heightened by the sick world work dealing with faith. In The Meaning of Revelation, Niebuhr of 1934,³ Niebuhr answers, "Have faith," and in the conclusion points to Tolstoy's My Confession as a witness to the necessity of of the article expounds the meaning of faith as a life structure.

Not content with an entirely subjective exposition of "faith,"¹ Niebuhr wishes the clue to the relationship between this article and later writings, for in a 1939 article this same passage is referred to in a similar context.¹ H. R. Niebuhr, "What Then Must We Do?", Christian Century Pulpit, V (1934), pp. 145-147. this verse, again in a similar context.

² Nineteen hundred and thirty-two is a crucial year in the development of the theology of Barth, the year in which die Kirchliche Dogmatik I appeared. Barth's The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy, New York (1936), a reference which makes the hyper-Protestant William F. Zuredoog

³ Niebuhr refers specifically to "the storm of war that is even now gathering upon the horizon." Ibid., p. 145. 363.

⁴ Ibid., p. 147. "Life is Worth Living." Intercollegian and Far Horizons, LVII (1939), pp. 3-4, 22.

⁷ Leo Nikolaevich Tolstoy, My Confession, New York (1899).

⁶ H. R. Niebuhr, "Life is Worth Living," p. 4.

⁵ H. R. Niebuhr, Christ and Culture, New York (1951), pp. 56-64

however, Niebuhr includes a reference to the true object of faith in terms of Exodus 3:4. Faith is to be based upon the "I am that I am," that is, "...the last reality which is our creator and slayer."⁵

2. Leo Tolstoi and Faith as Trust

Continuing to expound on this theme of faith in 1939 in the article "Life is Worth Living,"⁶ Niebuhr introduces a new element, gained from the writings of Leo Tolstoi, into his interpretation of faith as a dynamic life force. Quoting from Tolstoi's My Confession,⁷ Niebuhr points to faith as "...knowledge of the meaning of life in consequence of which man does not destroy himself but lives. Faith is the force of life."⁸ From this time on, references to Tolstoi are frequent--always--with the exception of the long section on him in Christ and Culture,⁹ in sections of his work dealing with faith. In The Meaning of Revelation, Niebuhr points to Tolstoi's My Confession as a witness to the necessity of

⁵Ibid. It is the reference to this passage which furnishes the clue to the relationship between this article and later writings, for in a 1939 article this same passage is referred to in a similar context, and in 1960 Niebuhr devotes several pages of Radical Monotheism to an exposition of this verse, again in a similar context. Cf., H. R. Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism and Western Culture, University of Nebraska, (1960), reprinted with four supplementary essays by Harper, New York (1960). In the course of the exposition of Exodus 3:14, R. H. Niebuhr refers to E. Gilson's The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy, New York (1936), a reference which makes the hyper-Protestant William F. Zuurdeeg "writhe on bristle." Cf., Zuurdeeg's review of R. H. Niebuhr in Theology Today, XVIII, No. 2, pp. 360-364, esp. p. 363.

⁶H. R. Niebuhr, "Life Is Worth Living," Intercollegian and Far Horizons, LVII (1939), pp. 3-4, 22.

⁷Leo Nikolaevich Tolstoi, My Confession, New York (1899).

⁸H. R. Niebuhr, "Life Is Worth Living," p. 4.

⁹H. R. Niebuhr, Christ and Culture, New York (1951), pp. 56-64)

faith for life itself much in the same manner as he had done in the earlier article.¹⁰ The prominence given to Tolstoi in Christ and Culture, even though in a somewhat different context, shows the continued presence of his thought in Niebuhr's mind. Moreover, references to and quotations from many more works of Tolstoi reveal Niebuhr's increased knowledge of his thought and works in the years following 1939.¹¹ By 1960 Niebuhr's mature interpretation of faith, as, on the one hand, confidence or trust and, on the other hand, as loyalty had taken definite form and in a passage from Radical Monotheism we see the contribution made by Tolstoi to this Niebuhrian understanding of faith. Writing in that book, Niebuhr says, "The two aspects of faith...can be more fully explored with the aid of two thinkers: Tolstoi and Royce. In Tolstoi's analysis of faith, attention is directed to the importance for life of confidence in a value-center."¹²

¹⁰H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, New York (1941), pp. 77-78.

¹¹Among the Tolstoian works directly referred to by Niebuhr in Christ and Culture are the following: "The Christian Teaching," "What I Believe," "The Gospel in Brief," "The Kingdom of God Within You," "The Restoration of Hell," "Religion and Morality," "What Is Religion?", "Church and State," "An Appeal to the Clergy," "What Then Must We Do?", "On Life," "Reason and Religion," and "What Is Art?". All are taken from the Tolstoi Centennial Edition, London (1928-1937).

¹²Niebuhr, op. cit., p. 18. In view of these many references to Tolstoi, which occur over a number of years (1939-1960), and in a consistent context, it is strange that there is no mention of his influence in any of the secondary literature on Niebuhr. Perhaps this is understandable for Kliever, who offers a systematic study of Niebuhr's methodology, but one would expect some reference to Tolstoi in Haedemaker's presentation of Niebuhr's theology under the category of faith. Also, one misses any reference to Tolstoi in Frei's contribution to the Niebuhr Festschrift, Faith and Ethics. Cf., Lonnie Kliever, Methodology and Christology in H. Richard Niebuhr, Liabertus Haedemaker, Faith In Total Life, and P. Ramsey, Faith and Ethics, pp. 9-116.

¹³Niebuhr, "The Christian Church in the World's Crisis," Christianity and Society, 13 (1943), pp. 11-17.

3. Josiah Royce and Faith as Loyalty

If Tolstoi's stimulation contributed to the emergence of the confidence dimension of Niebuhr's understanding of faith, Josiah Royce's philosophy of loyalty was no less significant in furnishing Niebuhr with a key to understanding the loyalty dimension of faith.¹³ In continuation of the paragraph quoted above, Niebuhr says, "In Royce's philosophy of loyalty the meaning of faithfulness is explored. But that these two things belong together in life also becomes apparent."¹⁴ This late explicit reference to Royce's aid in explaining faith in terms of loyalty sheds light on earlier references to this theme and to Royce in books and articles dating from 1935.¹⁵ Niebuhr's first reference to Royce appears in his earliest published work, but this reference has nothing to do with his later understanding of faith so is to be discounted in the present discussion.¹⁶ In 1935, Niebuhr expressed the proper religious attitude toward God, which he later designates as "faith" in terms of loyalty,¹⁷ and again in a 1941 article he expresses the problem of Christian life as the problem of organizing and shaping of lives so that "...they will express confidence in and loyalty to the Father of Jesus Christ..."¹⁸ In neither of these

articles, however, is there specific reference to Royce. The first

¹³Josiah Royce, The Philosophy of Loyalty, New York (1909).

¹⁴Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism, p. 18.

¹⁵Niebuhr, "An Aspect of the Idea of God in Recent Thought," p. 42.

¹⁶Niebuhr, "Man the Sinner," Journal of Religion, XV (1935), pp. 272-280.

¹⁷Niebuhr, "The Christian Church in the World's Crisis," Christianity and Society, VI (1941), pp. 11-17.

such explicit reference to him comes in the concluding chapter of Christ and Culture in the section in which Niebuhr is developing his own tentative answer to the problem of the relationship between Christ and culture.¹⁸ The answer, Niebuhr suggests, must

be given by each individual as he decides freely in faith and the community of faith. Faith is then expounded dynamically as confidence and loyalty, and it is in the midst of this section that

the reference to Royce occurs.¹⁹ The next reference to Royce's philosophy of loyalty occurs in a 1954 article in which Niebuhr deals with faith as a social and psychological phenomenon,²⁰ again expounding it in terms of confidence and loyalty. In this article,

Royce is Niebuhr's major authority for his interpretation of faith as loyalty.²¹

This brings us again to the reference to Royce from Radical Monotheism with which this section on Royce began and which furnishes us with a key to the precise nature of Roycean influence. Only one other major work of Niebuhr appeared after Radical Monotheism, the

¹⁸Niebuhr, Christ and Culture, p. 253.

¹⁹The reference is to The Philosophy of Loyalty and The Problem of Christianity, New York (1913).

²⁰Niebuhr, "The Triad of Faith," Andover Newton Bulletin, XLVII (1954), pp. 3-12.

²¹Ibid., pp. 7, 9. On page 9 Niebuhr distinguishes his approach to the problem from Royce's, stating that, "For Royce the cause is always the community itself," a cause which for Niebuhr is not universal enough. In light of the final chapter of Royce's Philosophy of Loyalty it would appear, however, that Niebuhr does less than justice to Royce, who in this chapter titled "Loyalty and Religion" defines loyalty as "the will to manifest, so far as is possible, the eternal, that is, the conscious and superhuman unity of life, in the form of the acts of an individual self." Royce, op. cit., p. 357.

posthumously published The Responsible Self. The single reference to Royce in this work confirms the thesis that Royce's chief influence came through his contribution to Niebuhr's understanding of faith. Niebuhr states in 1960, "He (Royce) sought to understand the moral life as primarily an affair of loyalty."²²

B. The Growth of Existentialistic Influences on Niebuhr's Thought

1. Introduction

Closely related to the increasing importance of Niebuhr's understanding of faith for his theology was his discovery, beginning in 1934, shortly before the high-water mark of Barthian influence on

²²H. Richard Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, New York (1963). The secondary literature on Niebuhr treats the role of Royce more adequately than that of Tolstoi. Cf., Hans Frei, "Niebuhr's Theological Background," pp. 11, 14; Hans Frei, "The Theology of H. Richard Niebuhr," p. 78, footnote 32, in Faith and Ethics. All of these references except the latter are, however, extremely general and say really no more than that Royce influenced Niebuhr. Paul Ramsey in his contribution to the Niebuhr Festschrift is as specific as any scholar in his discussion of Royce's influence on Niebuhr. Cf., Ramsey, "The Transformation of Ethics," Faith and Ethics, pp. 140-172, esp. p. 156. D. D. Williams mentions the influence of Royce on Niebuhr in his contribution to the Niebuhr eulogy in Christianity and Crisis. Vide D. D. Williams, "A Personal Theological Memoir," Christianity and Crisis, XXIII, No. 20, p. 213. The relationship between Niebuhr and Royce is likewise implied in Gustafson's juxtaposition of the two men's thoughts on community in Chapter IV of his book on the Church, James Gustafson, Treasure in Earthen Vessels, New York (1961). Kliever discusses the influence of Royce's concept of a community of interpretation in Chapter II of his doctoral dissertation on Niebuhr's understanding of revelation, and in Chapter III, more to the point for our discussion, discusses Niebuhr's concept of faith as confidence and loyalty here, however, without specific mention of Royce's contribution.

not unique but is a part of a more general development in American intellectual circles during the thirties. Sydney E. Ahlstrom calls it a "collective phenomenon." Vide Smith and Jamison, Religion in American Life, I, p. 313.

²⁴Niebuhr, op. cit., p. 213.

²⁵H. Bergson, The Meaning of History, New York (1936)

on his theology of existentialism.²³ This discovery seemed to undergird and encourage Niebuhr's preoccupation with faith as a dynamic life force. By its attempt to place the self at the center of its interpretation of reality and exalt the subject over the object, existentialism also offered Niebuhr a personalist philosophical context within which to integrate his thinking on faith. It is now necessary to follow the emergence of this existentialist mode of thought in Niebuhr's works.

2. Berdyaev

Niebuhr's first mention of any of those authors who are generally called existentialists occurs in 1937 in a footnote in Kingdom of God.²⁴ The reference is to Berdyaev's The Meaning of History²⁵ and occurs in the concluding chapter of the book, but its use does not indicate that Niebuhr's thought process had at this time been significantly influenced by Berdyaev or other existentialist thinkers.

²³ Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, pp. 63, 145.

²⁴ A quick glance through the list of Niebuhr's book reviews during the years 1934-1938 reveals the same preoccupation with existentialism which 1932-1933 revealed with Barth and crisis theology. During those years, Niebuhr reviewed the following books: 1934--Berdyaev, The End of Our Time, and his Christianity and Class War; 1936--Berdyaev's Dostoevsky, An Interpretation, and Allen's Kierkegaard: His Life and Thought; 1938--Buber, I and Thou; Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments; Geismar, Lectures on the Religious Thought of Soren Kierkegaard: His Life and Religious Teaching; Allen, Kierkegaard: His Life and Thought, and Berdyaev, The Destiny of Man. Niebuhr's concentration on existentialism is not unique but is a part of a more general development in American intellectual circles during the thirties. Sydney E. Ahlstrom calls it a "collective phenomenon." Vide Smith and Jamison, Religion in American Life, I, p. 313.

²⁴ Niebuhr, op. cit., p. 210.

²⁵ N. Berdyaev, The Meaning of History, New York (1936)

3. Martin Buber

It is a different story, however, when we come to the 1941 references to the work of Martin Buber.²⁶ Here it is apparent that Buber's distinction between I-it and I-thou relationships has furnished Niebuhr with a key insight for the development of the single thesis of this important book on revelation. This thesis is that God can only be known through revelation, that revelation can only take place and be understood within history, and that history can only exist as a history of selves, i.e. within the context of a personalist "I-thou" universe.²⁷ Indeed, God Himself reveals Himself within this context not as "an impersonal process of thinking" but as "a person with a definite character, just this particular self."²⁸ For this thought, Niebuhr confesses, we are indebted to Martin Buber since, "He, more than any other thinker of our object-obsessed time, has analyzed this relationship (I-Thou) for us in his significant book, I and Thou."²⁹

²⁶H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, pp. 65, 146.

²⁷Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, p. 65. There is, of course, such a thing as external history, but this is irrelevant as far as revelation and hence the knowledge of God is concerned. Cf., Niebuhr, op. cit., pp. 59-73.

²⁸Ibid., p. 146.

²⁹Ibid., On the following page and in the same context occurs the single reference I have found in Niebuhr's work to the writings of Miguel Unamuno. This Spanish existentialist, however, has never really been discovered by America but has remained largely the property of a small intellectual elite. Cf., John Mackay's chapter in Earl Michelson, Christianity and the Existentialists, New York (1956).

³³Niebuhr, "The Trial of Faith," Answer Boston Bulletin, XLVII, pp. 3-12.

³⁴Op. cit., pp. 241-242. The particular work of Kierkegaard's which excites is Concluding Unscientific Postscript which is also the name he gives to the concluding chapter of Christ and Culture, pp. 230-256.

4. Soren Kierkegaard

Just two years after the appearance of Meaning of Revelation, Niebuhr, in the very existentialist-oriented article discussed above,³⁰ refers to that existentialist to whom Frei says he is "deeply indebted,"³¹ It is Kierkegaard's awareness of God as person and as judge to which Niebuhr appeals in this article, but the reference is too brief to bear a long exegesis. Though they contain no explicit references to Kierkegaard, the articles "The Ego-Alter Dialectic,"³² and "The Triad of Faith"³³ support Ahlstrom's statement on the "Kierkegaardian" nature of Niebuhr's thought. It is the closing section of Christ and Culture, however, which enables us to locate more precisely the point at which Kierkegaard has been most formative of Niebuhr's thought processes. Attempting to sketch the outlines of a tentative answer to the dilemma with which the book wrestles, the dilemma of the proper relationship between Christ and culture, Niebuhr appeals to Kierkegaard "to whom belongs the honor of having underscored and ministered to this existential nature of the irreducible self more than any other modern thinker" and who thus "can be something of a guide to us in our effort to understand how, in facing our enduring problem, we must and can arrive at our answers, rather than at the Christian answer."³⁴

³⁰Niebuhr, "The Nature and Existence of God."

³¹Hans Frei, in Paul Ramsey's, Faith and Ethics, p. 79. Sydney Ahlstrom calls the thought of both Niebuhr brothers "Kierkegaardian." Smith and Jamison, op. cit., Vol I, p. 315.

³²The Journal of Philosophy, LXII, p. 352-359.

³³Niebuhr, "The Triad of Faith," Andover Newton Bulletin, XLVII, pp. 3-12.

³⁴Op. cit., pp. 241-242. The particular work of Kierkegaard's which excites is Concluding Unscientific Postscript which is also the name he gives to the concluding chapter of Christ and Culture, pp. 230-256.

The next indication of Niebuhr's continued interest in Kierkegaard is his contribution in 1956 of a chapter on the philosopher to the book on existentialism edited by Micholson.³⁵ This article shows not only a knowledge of Kierkegaard but an understanding of Kierkegaard's intention.

The absence of any reference to Kierkegaard in Niebuhr's Radical Monotheism and the two brief references to him in The Responsible Self³⁶ belie the continuing and, in fact, deepening Kierkegaardian tone underlying these books. The emphasis on personal being, on self-hood, on the "I" in Radical Monotheism is hardly imaginable apart from the work of Kierkegaard and its discovery in the 20s and 30s of our century.³⁷ Similarly, The Responsible Self, which develops the philosophical basis of the ethics that Niebuhr planned to write when death overtook him,³⁸ being as it is from beginning to end "phenomenological analysis of man's moral existence"³⁹ or, as Niebuhr himself put it in his lectures at Yale, a consideration of "The Structures and Dynamics of the Moral Life,"⁴⁰ is deeply indebted to the existentialism of Kierkegaard not only at one or two points but throughout.

³⁵Micholson, Christianity and the Existentialists, pp. 23-42.

³⁶Op. cit., pp. 92, 121.

³⁷Cf., op. cit., pp. 44-45.

³⁸Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, p. 1.

³⁹Vide Gustafson's Introduction to The Responsible Self, p. 8.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 7.

⁴²Niebuhr, "Reflections Concerning Imperative," Christian Century, (March 2, 1953), p. 230.

⁴³Prof. Faith and Ethics, p. 7.

One can find favorable references to other existentialists in Niebuhr's writings⁴¹ but no indication that their influence was anything like as extensive as that of Buber and Kierkegaard. As regards the general influence of existentialism in his later thought, Niebuhr himself spoke the last word in 1960. "Existentialism also has served to reinforce my concern for the personal, for the religiously experienced, for the I-Thou relations between God and man and between men."⁴²

C. Sociologists' Influence Toward a Social Existentialism

1. Introduction

In the opening page of his contribution to the Niebuhr Festschrift, Frei says, "In a picture of Niebuhr's thought...one would be immediately struck by his unique, effortless intertwining of theological and sociological analyses."⁴³ It is the intention of this section to trace some of those sociological influences in Niebuhr's thought and determine precisely at what point and in what manner they influenced his work.

2. Emile Durkheim

The works of the French sociologist, Emile Durkheim, with which Niebuhr became familiar early in his career, exerted a limited but important influence on his thought at a particular point. His

⁴¹Heidegger in The Responsible Self, pp. 112, 116; Jaspers and Marcel, Ibid., p. 112; and Sartre in Radical Monotheism, p. 29. In the case of Sartre, however, Niebuhr offers a negative judgment of what he considers "extreme existentialism which seems to represent the dying effort of the self to maintain itself by faith--but now by faith in nothing."

⁴²Niebuhr, "Reformation: Continuing Imperative," Christian Century, (March 2, 1960), p. 250.

⁴³Frei, Faith and Ethics, p. 9.

first reference to Durkheim occurs in 1927 in "Theology and Psychology: A Sterile Union."⁴⁴ Here Durkheim's work, and particularly its appropriation by theology, is rejected as leading to too great a subjectivism.⁴⁵

Three years later, however, in an article in The Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences,⁴⁶ Niebuhr explains the origin of "dogma" with the aid of precisely that concept of Durkheim's which is to make a permanent contribution to his mature thought, the concept of "collective representation."⁴⁷ Dogma is the last stage of the abstraction of ideas which began in the collective representation of societies.

In a later, very important article developing his understanding of the Self, Niebuhr refers again to the same concept of Durkheim's in a context which significantly reveals the exact way in which this idea worked in his thought.⁴⁸ Here Niebuhr speaks of the

⁴⁴H. Richard Niebuhr, "Theology and Psychology: A Sterile Union," Christian Century, XLVI (1927), pp. 47-48.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 47.

⁴⁶Cf., H. Richard Niebuhr's "Dogma," in E. R. A. Salizman, Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, New York (1931) III, pp. 189-191.

⁴⁷Ibid., P. 189. Cf, also, E. Durheim, The Elementary Forms of The Religious Life, London, New York p. 10.

⁴⁸Niebuhr, "The Ego Alter Dialectic and Conscience," Journal of Philosophy, (1945), p. 354. The name of Durkheim is mentioned together with that of Mead, whose social psychology we will consider next. Both men influenced Niebuhr similarly, contributing to his understanding of the Self, which was so important a section in his later theological system.

"narrowness" of Durkheim's conception, but, nevertheless, finds the conception itself suggestive and meaningful.

The last mention of Durkheim in Niebuhr's writings occurs in Radical Monotheism.⁴⁹ The reference to Durkheim indicates that at this time Niebuhr took his principle of the social origin of religion quite for granted and that his criticism remained within the concept. He would choose to enlarge the compass of society beyond the clan or tribe of Durkheim, beyond the nation of contemporary henotheistic faith, beyond "mankind" of the humanists, to include the entire universe.⁵⁰

⁴⁹Niebuhr, op. cit., p. 88. After graduating from Oberlin College, Niebuhr went to Harvard under William James and Josiah Royce. At the University of Leipzig, he was influenced by Max Weber, which he eventually gave up in favor of Protestantism.

⁵⁰In an essay on "Christian Ethics and Social Policy" in the Niebuhr Festschrift which develops the same philosophy of Self contained in the above mentioned works of Niebuhr, J. Gustafson refers to Durkheim's contribution of the concept of "collective representation." Vide, Faith and Ethics, p. 134, note 30. Likewise, Zuurdeeg, in his letter to Niebuhr finds among many other things also this ground to criticize Niebuhr--that he has been influenced by Durkheim. Zuurdeeg, Theology Today, XVII (1961), p. 361. Niebuhr was a member of the Chicago (1956). Often associated with the work of Paul in that of Harry Stack Sullivan, a prominent American psychiatrist (died 1949), sometimes considered a member of the "Chicago school" of psychiatry, and Charles Heston Cooley (died 1959), American sociologist and participant in 1905 in the founding of the American Sociological Society. Niebuhr mentions these three together on p. 72 of The Responsible Self.

⁵²Niebuhr, Journal of Religious Ethics, XLII (1945), pp. 106-117.

⁵³George W. H. Dyer, Man, Self, and Society

the 3. G. H. Mead relationship to itself as object not directly but only Niebuhr's first reference to the social psychology of G. H. Mead⁵¹ occurs in 1945 in "The Ego Alter Dialectic."⁵² In this article he quotes extensively from those sections of Mead's Mind, Self, and Society⁵³ in which he discusses the formation of the self and mind by the interpersonal relationships in the society. The basic structure of the self is the subject-object relationship. The self is subject which has itself as its own object and without this basic dialectic relationship, selfhood is not possible. But

of selfhood in 1960, Niebuhr again points to Mead. "How is it
⁵¹G. H. Mead, born 1863; died 1931. After graduating from Oberlin College, Mead studied at Harvard under William James and Josiah Royce. Later, while^a student at the University of Leipzig, he was influenced by Hegelian philosophy, which he eventually gave up in favor of pragmatism. The greater part of his life he spent as professor at the University of Chicago. Though publishing only essays and reviews during his life, after his death students of his gathered notes from classes and published four volumes of his works: The Philosophy of the Present, Chicago (1932); Mind, Self, and Society, Chicago (1934); Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century, Chicago (1936); The Philosophy of the Act, Chicago (1938). Anselm Strauss has edited a selection of Mead's works under the title The Social Philosophy of George Herbert Mead, Chicago (1956). Often associated with the work of Mead is that of Harry Stack Sullivan, a prominent American psychiatrist (died 1949), sometimes considered a member of the "cultural school" of psychiatry, and Charles Heaton Cooley (died 1929), an American sociologist and participant in 1905 in the founding of the American Sociological Society. Niebuhr mentions these three together on p. 71 of The Responsible Self.

section of the last chapter of Christ and Culture is titled, "Social

⁵²Niebuhr, Journal of Philosophy, XLII (1945), pp. 106-117.

⁵³George H. Mead, Mind, Self, and Society

⁵⁴George H. Mead, Mind, Self, and Society, p. 138., quoted by Niebuhr, op. cit., p. 353.

⁵⁵Mead, The Philosophy of the Present, pp. 189-190., quoted by Niebuhr, op. cit., p. 353.

⁵⁶H. Richard Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, p. 72.

⁵⁷Niebuhr, Christ and Culture, pp. 230-256, esp. pp. 241-256.

the self gains a relationship to itself as object not directly but only "by taking the attitudes of other individuals toward himself within a social environment or context of experience and behavior in which both he and they are involved."⁵⁴ Concluding the argument on the relationship between the self and society, Niebuhr employs another quote from Mead, "We are in possession of selves just in so far as we can and do take the attitudes of others toward ourselves and respond to these attitudes."⁵⁵

Returning to this theme of the reflexive (I-me) structure of selfhood in 1960, Niebuhr again points to Mead. "How is it possible," he asks, "that a being can become an object to itself?" Answering his own question, he continues, "Only, Mead argues, through dialogue with others."⁵⁶ And he continues this dialogue with Mead for several pages, relating this thought to the I-thou relationship of Buber.

A final reference to the works of Niebuhr, this time to Christ and Culture, will serve to indicate how the thinking of the social psychologists Mead, Cooley, and Sullivan, modified the Kierkegaardian existentialism discussed above. The concluding section of the last chapter of Christ and Culture is titled, "Social Existentialism."⁵⁷ The chapter itself, having taken its name from

⁵⁴George H. Mead, Mind, Self, and Society, p. 138., quoted by Niebuhr, op. cit., p. 353.

⁵⁵Mead, The Philosophy of the Present, pp. 189-190., quoted by Niebuhr, op. cit., p. 353.

⁵⁶H. Richard Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, p. 72.

⁵⁷Niebuhr, Christ and Culture, pp. 230-256, esp. pp. 241-256.

Kierkegaard's identically titled work, is very Kierkegaardian, but in this concluding section, Niebuhr warns us that "he (Kierkegaard) can easily become a fallacious guide if we accept his denials along with his affirmations."⁵⁸ Then he proceeds to correct Kierkegaard by giving to his individualistic existentialism a strong social dimension. To illustrate this change from individual to social existentialism, Niebuhr chooses a key passage from Concluding Unscientific Postscript, a speech of Johannes Climacus, and changes the "I's" to "We's," commenting "the existential problem,....cannot be phrased simply in terms of the "I." We are involved, and every "I" confronts its destiny in our salvation or damnation."⁵⁹ Here we see clearly how the social thought represented by men like Durkheim and Mead has entered as a constituent element into Niebuhr's thinking.⁶⁰

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 242.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 243. Italics Niebuhr's.

⁶⁰There are further references to Mead in some of the secondary literature. Thus, Schrader in Faith and Ethics, p. 184, mentions Niebuhr's appreciation for the insights of Mead but suggests these should have been applied by Niebuhr to his analysis of self-existence. Niebuhr, in a footnote in Radical Monotheism, p. 105, implies that he does indeed apply these insights and that Schrader has misunderstood him. In light of the above discussion, Niebuhr is clearly in the right and one wonders precisely what Schrader is talking about when he suggests he apply Mead's insights in his (Niebuhr's) analysis of self-existence.

⁶¹Ibid. However, never joined that chorus of petty degenerators of faith which filled Europe with tears after the World War. As late as 1937, Niebuhr shows an understanding and appreciation even the much overrated idea of Barth's "humanism." Cf. Niebuhr's introduction to the larger paperback edition of Fauschbeck's The Essence of Christianity, New York (1937).

⁶²Karl Barth, Die Kirchliche Dogmatik, I, (1932) p. viii, ix.

D. Conclusion: Barth and Niebuhr, 1935-1960

The preceding discussion should have indicated how the thought of Niebuhr and Barth began to diverge around 1936 and continued to move apart during the next twenty-five years, so that Niebuhr could say in 1960, "In the 1950s I had turned against that movement (Barthianism) in its later forms and the tendencies associated with it and had given indications of resuming contact with the earlier modes of theological thought."⁶¹ Or, again, in the same article, "I now disassociated myself from Karl Barth's theology."⁶²

One of the main reasons for the divergence of the thought of these two men is precisely the growing influence of existentialism in Niebuhr's work, at a time during which Barth set out to purge his thought of its last dependence on existentialism. "...To the best of my ability," he says in the preface to Kirchliche Dogmatik, "I have cut out in this second issue of the book everything that in the first issue might have given the slightest appearance of giving to theology a basis, support, or even a mere justification in the way of existential philosophy."⁶³

To allow even the implication of any such dependency seemed to Barth to be a readoption of the Schleiermacher-Ritchie-Herrmann line which could only ultimately lead to the complete basis for his Word of God. Cf. the correspondence between Barth and Thurneysen, Karl Barth, Edward Thurneysen, Reformation: Continuing Imperative, Christian Century, LXXVII, p. 248.

⁶²Ibid. Niebuhr, however, never joined that chorus of petty degenerators of Barth which filled Europe with jeers after the World War. As late as 1957, Niebuhr shows he understands and appreciates even the much overlooked fact of Barth's "humanism." Cf. Niebuhr's introduction to the Harper Torchbook edition of Feuerbach's The Essence of Christianity, New York (1957).

⁶³Karl Barth, die Kirchliche Dogmatik, I, (1932) p. viii, ix.

"anthropologization" of theology alla Feuerbach.⁶⁴ A second reason for the growing difference between the thought of Niebuhr and Barth in the late thirties and throughout the forties is Niebuhr's increasing preoccupation with faith as a human phenomenon. Barth again is moving in a different direction, firmly subjecting the human faith-response to God's promise, to the act of God's promise itself, thus increasing the already great objective moment in his theology.⁶⁵ It is particularly interesting to note that in their discussions of faith and its role in Christian teaching, both Barth and Niebuhr refer to the same word of Luther's which stands at the beginning of his exposition of the First Commandment in the Large Catechism.⁶⁶ Barth, however, devotes several pages to proving that the subjective interpretation of these sayings offered by Wolthermin, Ritschl, and others is not true to the intention of the author, while Niebuhr exploits precisely the subjective side of the sayings.

⁶⁴Ibid. Eng. p. x. Cf also, Barth's lecture on Feuerbach in Die Theologie und die Kirche, Zürich, (1928), Vol II, pp. 212-239. This lecture was reprinted as an introduction to the Harper Torchbook edition of Feuerbach's, The Essence of Christianity. Barth had discovered Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky and other existentialists twenty years earlier than Niebuhr, but by 1932 he had found a new basis for his theology in his doctrine of the Word of God. Cf. the correspondence between Barth and Thurneyson, Karl Barth, Edward Thurneyson, Ein Briefwechsel, Zurich (1966), pp. 54, 68.

⁶⁵Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, I, p. 203; English, p. 185; pp. 208, 209; English, pp. 190, 191.

⁶⁶Karl Barth, Die Kirchliche Dogmatik, I, p. 266; English, p. 244. Niebuhr, Nature and Existence of God, IV (1943), p. 43. Meaning of Revelation, p. 23.

Clearly then, we must say, as Niebuhr himself said,⁶⁷ that during the fifties Niebuhr, falling under the influence of philosophical ideas, turned against the movement of "Barthianism."⁶⁸ It is during these years that he developed the thought patterns which he would, in the last few years of his life, integrate into a consistent theological synthesis.⁶⁹ This style emerges in the only two works which can be considered representative of his full maturity--Radical Monotheism and The Responsible Self. The next chapter will examine the Niebuhrian synthesis as it is revealed in these two works.

⁶⁷Cf. Footnote 61.

⁶⁸It goes without saying that Barth has always detested the term "Barthianism." Cf. Die Kirchliche Dogmatik, I, pp. xi-xii.

⁶⁹One cannot really speak of a system in terms of Niebuhr who disliked systematic thinking.

¹Karl Barth, Die Kirchliche Dogmatik. For a detailed discussion of the relationship between Barth's and Niebuhr's theological methodology, see Lewis Mumford's Christology and Methodology in the Theology of K. Barth and N. Niebuhr, esp. pp. 18-31. The specific non-theological influences influencing Niebuhr's theology are elaborated in the previous chapter. They include psychology, the insights of which were employed in his study of "Faith" as an empirical reality; philosophy, which influenced him both in his definition of "faith" and in his existential thought on revelation; and sociology from which he again gained further insights into the phenomena of faith and with the help of which he sought to modify existentialism.

²It is Schoedinger who charged Barth with basing his theology on a positivism of revelation, a charge with which Niebuhr appears to agree. Cf. Dietrich Schoedinger, Letters and Papers from Prison, London (1953), pp. 183-4; N. Richard Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, p. 15, esp. Note 2.

Niebuhr is able to elaborate a consistent theology, including a theological methodology and an ethics organically related to and following out of this theology.² The former is systematically

CHAPTER FIVE: NIEBUHR'S FINAL SYNTHESIS

A. Introduction Religious Monotheism,³ the last of his writings published as stated in Chapter IV, during the years 1936 to 1960, a pronounced drift away from the theology of Karl Barth can be observed in Niebuhr's works. This was occasioned by the increasing influence of non-theological disciplines on Niebuhr's mind at a time in which Barth was concentrating

with increasing intensity on purging such influences and working along consistently theological lines with the integral Troeltsch's "historical-critical method" on the one hand and theological methodology he had elaborated in Volume I of Die Kirchliche Dogmatik.¹ It is only toward the end of the 1950's, and above all in his last two works, that Niebuhr is able to or attempted to show the relationship between his theology and ethics. construct a theological synthesis which frees him from the two extremes of historicism on the one hand and Barthian "positivism" on the other.² With the aid of this synthesis,

³H. Richard Niebuhr, Religious Monotheism, (1960).

¹Karl Barth, Die Kirchliche Dogmatik. For a detailed discussion of the relationship between Barth's and Niebuhr's theological methodology, see Lonnie Kliever's Christology and Methodology in the Theology of H. Richard Niebuhr, esp. pp. 18-31. The specific non-theological disciplines influencing Niebuhr's theology are elaborated in the previous chapter. They include psychology, the insights of which were employed in his study of "faith" as an empirical reality; philosophy, which influenced him both in his definition of "faith" and in his existential thought on revelation; and sociology from which he again gained further insights into the phenomenon of faith and with the help of which he sought to modify existentialism.

²It is Bonhoeffer who charged Barth with basing his theology on a positivism of revelation, a charge with which Niebuhr appears to agree. Cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, London (1953), pp. 163-4; H. Richard Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, p. 15, esp. Note 7.

Niebuhr is able to elaborate a consistent theology, including a theological methodology and an ethics organically related to and following out of this theology.³ The former is systematically elaborated in Radical Monotheism,⁴ the last of his writings published before his death. The closest we come to a systematic non presentation of his ethics is the posthumously published The Responsible Self.⁵ In this attempt at a presentation of Niebuhr's mature theological-ethical synthesis, it is primarily to these two works, along with related minor writings, which we must turn.

³Lonnie Kliever has dealt thoroughly with Niebuhr's theological methodology, comparing it with what he calls "faith" Troeltsch's "historical critical method" on the one hand and Barth's "revelational-dogmatic method" on the other. Kliever on calls Niebuhr's median way the "revelational-historical method," a designation much to the point. Lonnie Kliever, Methodology and Christology in H. Richard Niebuhr. It is unfortunate that no study has included a thorough exposition of Niebuhr's ethics or has attempted to show the relationship between his theology and ethics. This task is made more difficult by Niebuhr's untimely death in 1962 at a time in which he was preparing his ethics for publication, but will be attempted in the last section of this chapter with the aid of the posthumously published The Responsible Self, and James M. Gustafson's excellent introduction to that volume.

⁴H. Richard Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism, (1960). although

he hesi⁵H. Richard Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, (1963). Ined as Niebuhr's son informs us in his preface to this volume, "At the time H. Richard Niebuhr died, in July, 1962, he was at work fashioning into book form the basic ideas and constructive and critical principles of the systematic Christian ethics that he had taught and reflected upon during more than thirty years." Niebuhr, op. cit., p. 1.

⁶H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Triad of Faith," Andover Newton Bulletin, XLVII, p. 2.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., p. 4.

⁹H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Triad of Faith," Andover Newton Bulletin, XLVII, p. 2.

¹⁰H. Richard Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism, p. 22.

B. Theological System

1. The Point of Departure: The Phenomenon of Faith.

As has been pointed out in the previous chapter, from the middle of the 30's onward, Niebuhr became increasingly fascinated with the reality of "faith" as an historical phenomenon in human life and community. Gradually he elaborated the psychological structure of faith in terms of confidence and loyalty.⁶ and its sociological function in terms of the human community. This phenomenological study of "faith" then became the point of departure for his entire theological system.

At least as early as 1939, Niebuhr insists that "faith" as a human phenomenon is "given with life itself."⁷ Calling on Santayana and Tolstoi as witnesses, he insists that "without it (faith) human beings discover...they cannot live."⁸ That faith is, in fact, "the force of life."⁹ He continues to pursue this line of thought, universalizing faith as a generic reality and calling it, in a 1954 article, a reality "not peculiarly religious but human."¹⁰ In this final formulation of this position, although he hesitates to call such a generic concept of faith, defined as confidence and loyalty, "universal among human selves,"¹¹ Niebuhr

⁶(Wide above Chapter IV, pp. 111-115.) refers to A.J. Ayer's inconsistency in using such language as meaningless and yet behaving as if it were meaningful.

⁷H. Richard Niebuhr, "Life Is Worth Living," Intercollegian and Far Horizons, LVII, (1939) p.3. also, A.J. Ayer, Language, Truth and Loyalty, 1936, pp. 12, 13.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid. p. 4.

¹⁰H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Triad of Faith," Andover Newton Bulletin, XLVII, p.6.

¹¹H. Richard Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism, p. 22. op. cit., p. 357.

nevertheless finds it "significant that the dual faith relation makes its appearance even in the expressions of those men who are most skeptical of the meaningfulness of such terms as 'faith' and 'value.'"¹²

In this same article in 1939, Niebuhr begins to develop another insight into the faith phenomenon which later comes to play an important role in his mature theology. Within the genus "faith" Niebuhr distinguishes first two, then three species. In the 1939 article he names only one alternative to Christian faith, namely polytheism. Polytheism is the faith form opposed to and hostile toward Christian faith.¹³ As Kliever points out,¹⁴ by 1945 Niebuhr is speaking of three species of faith and has coined the names for each type which will appear and reappear in later works--polytheism, henotheism, and radical monotheism.¹⁵ It is, however, only the first two of these types which are given with life and which, therefore, can be called "natural faith." Between these two types of "natural faith" and radical monotheism, an event of great significance must intervene, an event which will be treated in the next section of this paper. But, first, it is necessary to describe the two forms of natural faith.

¹²Ibid. (Here Niebuhr rather appropriately refers to A.J. Ayer's inconsistency in attacking such language as meaningless and yet behaving as though he had profound faith in his cause, biological life. Radical Monotheism, p. 23. Cf. also, A.J. Ayer, Language, Truth and Loyalty, 1936, pp. 48, 58, 139.)

¹³H. Richard Niebuhr, "Life Is Worth Living," Intercollegiate and Far Horizons, LVII, (1939).

¹⁴Lonnie Kliever, Methodology and Christology, p. 142, note 2.

¹⁵The first appearance of these categories is in H. Richard Niebuhr's, "The Ego-Alter Dialectic," Journal of Philosophy, p. 357.

Such a description is available in Radical Monotheism, in the second chapter.¹⁶ Both of these faiths in addition to being described are attacked, as society, whether cultural or religious. By polytheism, Niebuhr is not talking only or even primarily about Hellenic Olympian religion or the animism of the jungle, but about the sort of pluralism described by Walter Lippmann in his Preface to Morals.¹⁷ This is the type of polytheism dominant, according to Niebuhr, in the western world today, a polytheism in which the modern man's "impulses are no longer part of one attitude toward life; his ideals... no longer in a hierarchy under one lordly ideal... They are in free and they are incommensurable."¹⁸ Another more sophisticated type of polytheism is represented by the philosophical value theorists by whom various values, e.g., Truth, Beauty, Justice, Peace, Love, Goodness, Pleasure are hypostasized and given a semi-divine power. They then become "interests that from moment to moment attract vagrant potencies resident in the mind and body."¹⁹

but still in a discussion on faith, on the practices of Senator

¹⁶ H. Richard Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism, pp. 24-37.

¹⁷ Joseph McCarthy.²⁴ Although Niebuhr does not name the senator Walter Lippmann, Preface to Morals, (1929). (Niebuhr was fond of quoting Lippmann at this point. Cf. Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, p. 17.) Christology and Methodology in H. Richard Niebuhr, 144.

¹⁸ Walter Lippmann, Preface to Morals, p. 111.

¹⁹ H. Richard Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism, p. 11.

¹⁹ H. Richard Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism, p. 30.

That Niebuhr has the value-philosophers in mind here is indicated in a similar passage in "The Center of Value" in which he refers to Nicolai Hartmann by name. Vide Radical Monotheism, p. 111.

makes Niebuhr's theology as relevant or perhaps more relevant in the 70s as it was in the 50s. To be sure, the Nixon administration's chauvinistic nationalism is more subtle than that of Senator McCarthy, but is no less dangerous. Niebuhr's criticism of monotheistic faith is a prophetic correction for any tendency towards absolutizing any finite reality.

²⁴ Joseph R. McCarthy, 1909-1957, was a controversial figure in American politics. As junior Senator from Wisconsin in February, 1950, he launched a massive and, his critics say, unconstitutional, attack on communists, pro-communists, and communist sympathizers. His power was at its height in 1954 at the time of Niebuhr's attack.

by name a less devious but more demonic form of natural which he
 faith is henotheism.²⁰ Henotheism, Niebuhr says, is "social when he
faith which makes a finite society, whether cultural or
 religious, the object of absolute trust and loyalty and which
 tends to subvert even officially monotheistic institutions."²¹
 It is against this demonic henotheistic faith that Niebuhr with can
 directs his most forceful remarks, thus he names international
 communist. The best and most common example of henotheistic he category
 faith is nationalism which "shows its character as faith with in
 whenever national welfare or survival is regarded as the tending
 supreme end of life."²² Here we see in him the continuation in
 a more subtle and refined form of that attack on nationalism with
 which Niebuhr launched his writing career in 1929.²³ That he
 remained on the alert for the dangers of nationalistic henotheism is
 further evident in references to political events in many of his
 writings. One of the best examples is a subtle attack which he
 made in a 1954 article, here in a somewhat different context
 but still in a discussion on faith, on the practices of Senator
 Joseph McCarthy.²⁴ Although Niebuhr does not name the senator

²⁰Lonnie Kliever, Christology and Methodology in H. Richard Niebuhr, p. 144.

²¹H. Richard Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism, p. 11.

²²Ibid., p. 27.

²³This attack on henotheistic faith in its nationalistic form makes Niebuhr's theology as relevant or perhaps more relevant in the 70s as it was in the 50s. To be sure, the Nixon administration's chauvanistic nationalism is more subtle than that of Senator McCarthy, but is no less dangerous. Niebuhr's criticism of henotheistic faith is a prophetic correction for any tendency towards absolutizing any finite reality.

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by name, anyone in 1954 hearing or reading the remarks which he makes in "The Triad of Faith" could not fail to realize to whom he referred.²⁵

Although by far the greatest amount of space is devoted "faith" as a universal concept which made life worth- to an exposition of henotheistic faith in its nationalistic while, particularly his reflections on the... form of faith²⁹ form, Niebuhr is careful to point out that this type of faith can which began at least as early as 1939,³⁰ led him to formulate also arise in other forms. Among these he names international a doctrine of revelation, communism which, by making "class" absolute, falls into the category In his analysis of the faith phenomenon, Niebuhr of a "social faith" along with nationalism. Likewise, faith in believed himself to have discovered existing along side "civilization," humanity,"²⁶ "nature," "life,"²⁷ though tending polytheistic and henotheistic forms of faith, a radical form in the right direction, does not attain to the reality of a of faith to which he gave the name "radical monotheism."³¹ radical monotheistic faith. Such a faith, precisely because it It is in his attempts to describe the origin of this radical is not "natural," cannot be attained and is not desired by

the natural man. On the contrary, says Niebuhr, "It is very rare," Christian Century, LXXVII, p. 258. Niebuhr says here that it is questionable, despite many protestations to the contrary, which led him "to see that the problem of the church... is not the problem of despite the prevalence of self-pity among some modern men because world, but from its own idolatries and henotheisms." This is a 'God is dead,' that anyone has ever yearned for radical faith's theology or ethics. This anti-idolatrous polemic could be the in the One God."²⁸ Such faith can only be described as a gift, if it were followed consistently in the ethical realm. accepted through conversion and mediated through revelation.

It is to the idea of Revelation that we must now turn.

²⁵The first use of this term occurs in H. Richard Niebuhr's, *The Purposes of the Church and Its Ministry*, (1956), p. 45. It is referred

²⁶H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Triad of Faith," p. 6, and *Ethics*, p. x, and is used as the title of a later book by Niebuhr himself.

²⁷Here the reference and criticism is directed at Mann's definition Bergson. Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism*, p. 35. Peterson's book, *Der Monotheismus als Politisches Problem*, and liberal theology's

²⁸Niebuhr refers to Albert Schweitzer's "reverence for life," *Ibid*, pp. 36, 37. 32. Roedemaker emphasizes this theme in Niebuhr's theology by the title of his thesis, *Faith in Total Life*.

²⁹*Ibid*, p. 31.

faith, so rare and so fleeting,³² that Niebuhr, stumblingly
2. Revelation and Conversion to Radical Monotheism

at first and then, in 1941 in The Meaning of Revelation with

1. Introduction

greater confidence, elaborated a well developed and consistent
Niebuhr's early, growing, and continued interest in
understanding of revelation.³³

"faith" as a universal human phenomenon which made life worth-

In his first attempts at a formulation of what after²⁹
while, particularly his "reflections on the....forms of faith"

1941 becomes his understanding of revelation, Niebuhr
which began at least as early as 1939,³⁰ led him to formulate
describes the experience of revelation as it functions to
a doctrine of revelation.

bring a man or woman to radical faith and indicates where, i.e. in

In his analysis of the faith phenomenon, Niebuhr

what area of life and history, this event of revelation takes
believed himself to have discovered existing along side

place.³⁴ Between 1939 and 1941 Niebuhr apparently gave a lot
polytheistic and henotheistic forms of faith, a radical form

of thought to the idea of revelation and published in 1941
of faith to which he gave the name "radical monotheism."³¹

his most comprehensive work on it. This and the relevant
It is in his attempts to describe the origin of this radical

section of Radical Monotheism are the basis for the following discussion.

²⁹H. Richard Niebuhr, "Reformation: Continuing Imperative,"
Christian Century, LXXVII, p. 250. Niebuhr says here that it is
reflection on the sovereignty of God and the forms of faith which
led him "to see that the problem of the church...is not the problem of
separating itself only from the idolatries and henotheism of the
world, but from its own idolatries and henotheisms." This is a
very important statement in any attempt to understand Niebuhr's
theology or ethics. This anti-idolatrous polemic could be the
basis of much radical action, both in the church and in the world,
if it were followed consistently in the ethical realm.

³⁰Frei discusses in a very confused way the role of
revelation in Niebuhr's thought.
³¹H. Richard Niebuhr, "Life Is Worth Living," p. 4.

³¹The first use of this name occurs in H. Richard Niebuhr's,
The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry, (1956), p. 46. It is
referred to by Paul Ramsey in his introduction to Faith and Ethics,
p. x, and is used as the title of a later book by Niebuhr himself.
Niebuhr says the term was suggested to him by Rudolf Bultmann's definition of
of Jesus' ethics as "radical obedience," Erik Peterson's book, Der
Monotheismus als Politisches Problem, and liberal theology's
definition of prophetic religion as "ethical monotheism." Niebuhr,
Radical Monotheism, p. 32. Hoedemaker emphasizes this theme in
Niebuhr's theology by the title of his thesis, Faith in Total Life.

³⁴H. Richard Niebuhr, "What Then Must We Do?" Christian
Century Pulpit, Volume V, No. 7, p. 147; "Life Is Worth
Living," Intercollegian and Far Horizons, LVII, (October, 1939) p. 22.

faith, so rare and so fleeting,³² that Niebuhr, stumblingly at first and then, in 1941 in The Meaning of Revelation with greater confidence, elaborated a well developed and consistent empirical reality, radical monotheistic faith, Niebuhr (1) understanding of revelation.³³

In his first attempts at a formulation of what after 1941 becomes his understanding of revelation, Niebuhr describes the experience of revelation as it functions to bring a man or woman to radical faith and indicates where, i.e. in what revelatory experience. The fact of revelation itself, however, being a firm conviction arrived at by the author in place.³⁴ Between 1939 and 1941 Niebuhr apparently gave a lot of thought to the idea of revelation and published in 1941

his most comprehensive work on it. This and the relevant section of Radical Monotheism are the basis for the following discussion.

³²We are acquainted with Radical Monotheism "more as hope than as datum, more...as possibility than actuality, yet also as an actuality that has modified at certain emergent periods our natural faith and our polytheism. In all the times and areas of our Western history this faith has struggled with its rivals, without becoming triumphant, save in passing moments and in the clarified intervals of personal existence." Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism, p. 31.

³³Frei discusses in a very confused way the role of revelation in Niebuhr's mature theology in his contribution to Faith and Ethics. The confusion is a result of his placing a number of concepts--valuation, relationalism, revelation, existentialism--on a par and involving himself in a more or less simultaneous discussion of all of them. He would have done better to have systematized more thoroughly and to have used the concepts of faith and revelation as hermeneutical keys to Niebuhr's theological methodology. Vide, Paul Ramsey, Faith and Ethics, pp. 65-94, esp. 75, 83, 92. Kliever saw more clearly the role of revelation in Niebuhr's theology in his doctoral dissertation. Lennie Kliever, Christology and Methodology, Chapters 2-5.

³⁴H. Richard Niebuhr, "What Then Must We Do?" Christian Century Palpit, Volume V, No. 7, p. 147; "Life Is Worth Living," Intercollegian and Far Horizons, LVII, (October, 1939) p. 22.

which Beginning with the reality of revelation, arrived The at as an explanation of the empirical origin of the likewise empirical reality, radical monotheistic faith, Niebuhr (1) no expounds the necessity for the theologian to begin his work with this revelation; (2) describes how this revelation comes get to him; and (3) indicates how he is to use it. In a final God, section (4) he seeks to describe the actual nature of the all revelatory experience.³⁵ The fact of revelation itself, a Christian however, being a firm conviction arrived at by the author in earlier years, is taken for granted.³⁶ and simply historic faith.³⁸

11. The Necessity of Revelation

In the introductory chapter on the need for the radical monotheistic theologian to make revelation the starting point for his constructive theological activity, Niebuhr reviews the developments in philosophy and theology

³⁵Roughly stated, these are the four themes of the four chapters of The Meaning of Revelation. H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, p. xi.

³⁶One can only speculate how and why Niebuhr arrived at this conviction. On the basis of remarks in "Reformation: Continuing Imperative," we are led to believe that personal experience played a large role. H. Richard Niebuhr, "Reformation: Continuing Imperative," Christian Century, LXXVII, p. 248. In the preface to The Meaning of Revelation, on the other hand, reference to Barth would indicate literary theological influence. Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, p. x. As there is no possibility so also there is no need to choose between these two types of influence, or even to separate them, since all experiences find their unity in the person of the theologian. The personal experience which may have contributed to the formation of Niebuhr's theology of revelation, however, was buried with Niebuhr, who was always reticent to talk about himself.

"Continuing Imperative" insists that he never abandoned historicism's insights even in the 1930s. "If testing our own historicity very seriously means being a liberal, then I remained a liberal even in the 30s." "Reformation: Continuing Imperative," p. 249.

³⁸H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, p. 23.

which have led to historical and religious relativism. The discovery of the historical dimension of life and the development of historicism³⁷ made it clear that there is no longer any possibility of developing a transcendent, historical philosophy or theology, since there is no way to get outside history. All knowledge, including knowledge of God, is mediated through history. Theology, therefore, like all other sciences, must begin in history, but this time in Christian History. "In this sense it (theology) is forced to begin with revelation, meaning by that word simply historic faith."³⁸

The theologian finds himself compelled to begin with revelation not only in response to the demands of historical relativism, but also because of the equally unavoidable demands of religious relativism. Religious relativism means that "one can speak and think about God only from the point of view of faith in Him."³⁹ That is, our knowledge of God is conditioned by our faith.

³⁷As pointed out in earlier chapters, Niebuhr was early and deeply influenced by historicism through the writings of Troeltsch. That this influence continued is indicated by references to him in the prefaces of The Meaning of Revelation and Christ and Culture. Niebuhr's statement in The Meaning of Revelation that his intention is to bring the main insight of Barth--the sovereignty of God--and that of Troeltsch--the historical nature of reality--together, adds credibility to the structure chosen by Kliever for his presentation of Niebuhr's theology in his doctoral dissertation.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 21-2. Here we see very clearly the re-emergence of the influence of historicism, mediated through Troeltsch. Cf., Chapter II, p. 38, ff. Vide also, Paul Ramsey, Faith and Ethics, p. 21ff; p. 53ff. Niebuhr himself commenting in "Reformation: Continuing Imperative," insists that he never abandoned historicism's insights even in the 1930s. "If taking our own historicity very seriously means being a liberal, then I remained a liberal even in the 30s." "Reformation: Continuing Imperative," p. 249.

³⁹H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, p. 23.

but in Niebuhr points to Luther as an early champion of revelation,⁴³ this idea of the relationship between faith and God and considers the tradition developed from Schleiermacher to Ritschl a qualitatively legitimate heir to this insight. The theological method worked out by Schleiermacher on the basis of this method and followed by the main stream of theological thought until the Barthian revolution, Niebuhr calls variously the "faith method" and "empirical theology."⁴⁰ The basic insight of this theology, that God and faith belong together, cannot be denied or avoided by the theologian. Therefore, recognizing this situation, the contemporary theologian must be content "to begin again with the faith of the Christian community and so with revelation."⁴¹

how retained in the present as future events are anticipated.⁴⁷

iii. Revelation Mediated Through Inner History Finally, human Used As Hermeneutical Principle is internal than

Clearly, on the basis of the content of the first chapter of The Meaning of Revelation, Niebuhr leaves no alternative but to look for revelation in history. But the question

is, Where in history? Already in the 1934 and 1939 articles referred to above,⁴² Niebuhr indicates the answer to this question, and internal history. Paul Ramsey, Faith and Ethics, pp. 89-91.

Lonnie Klover would agree, though it is doubtful if he would view the influence of H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, pp. 26, 23. As in the case of historicism, Niebuhr points out in 1960 that he had never abandoned this method. "I did not abandon religious empiricism any more than I abandoned historicism."⁴⁹ Niebuhr, op. cit., p. 249. It is simply a matter, from his point of view, of having regained his balance after his first confrontation with Barth, and having resumed "the general line of march represented by the evangelical, empirical and critical movement." in H. Richard Niebuhr, p. 108; James P. Gustafson in Treasure in Earthen Vessels, New York (1961). "The Church as A Community"

⁴¹H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, p. 36. Insights of Niebuhr on time. Op. cit., Chapter IV.

⁴²Cf. Note 32, p. 137

but in the second and third chapters of The Meaning of Revelation,⁴³ and in Radical Monotheism⁴⁴ he defines the locus of revelation more precisely. History, generally speaking, is divided qualitatively into internal and external history. It is in the realm of internal history that revelation is to be found.⁴⁵ Three concepts are used to illustrate the difference between internal and external history--value, time, and human association.⁴⁶ In external history, value means strength; in internal, worth for people. In external history, time is quantitative, numbered, serialized. For such a concept of time, past events are gone and future ones not yet here. Time in internal history, on the other hand, is our duration. It is organic and social, so that through memory and memorials, past events are somehow retained in the present as future events are anticipated.⁴⁷ Finally, human association is viewed differently in internal than

⁴³H. Richard Niebuhr, op. cit., pp. 43-108.

⁴⁴H. Richard Niebuhr, op. cit., p. 42f.

⁴⁵H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, p. 59.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 67. Frei is of the opinion that a Troeltschian influence is to be seen here again in Niebuhr's concepts of external and internal history. Paul Ramsey, Faith and Ethics, pp. 89-91. Lonnie Kliever would agree, though it is doubtful if he would view the influence in the same way that Frei does. Lonnie Kliever, Methodology and Christology in H. Richard Niebuhr, p. 32ff.

⁴⁷H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, p. 69. Niebuhr's concept of time, which Kliever sees as belonging to the tradition represented by Augustine, Bergson, Royce, Dilthey, and Mead and opposed to that of Kierkegaard and Kant, could well be the subject of further study. Cf., Lonnie Kliever, Methodology and Christology in H. Richard Niebuhr, p. 108; James F. Gustafson in Treasure in Earthen Vessels, New York (1961). "The Church as A Community of Memory and Understanding," follows up some of these insights of Niebuhr on time. Op cit., Chapter IV.

⁴⁸H. Richard Niebuhr, op. cit., p. 42ff.

in external history. In external history individuals are, the depersonalized, understood biologically, psychologically sociologically and often made means to an end. In internal history, on the other hand, persons are viewed as selves in community.⁴⁸

This line of thought is clarified by Niebuhr's reference to Martin Buber in his introduction to the section on internal and external history. External history is the history of I-it relationships, internal of I-Thou.⁴⁹ It is in this realm of the I-Thou that revelation occurs.

Continuing to narrow the locus of revelation, Niebuhr in chapter three further identifies the place of revelation as "that part of our inner history which illuminates the rest of it and however, the presentation is both obscure and unconvincing: His which is itself intelligible."⁵⁰

In the case of the church, this special part is the as a result of that awareness of mysticism which seems so universal event of Christ Jesus.

A clearer and more consistent discussion of the specific revelatory event in Christian inner history is developed in Radical Monotheism.⁵¹ Here revelation is defined as "those events in which radical faith was elicited."⁵² One could also say, those

events through which a conversion was first effected. In the west, it would be interesting to discuss in an essay the significance of these events are events in the history of Israel and, par excellence, the Christ event. Although this means locating revelation in that special area of history which the theologians call Heilsgeschichte, latter. The two categories are then related by Niebuhr's suggestion that the revelation, received in inner history, becomes a hermeneutic device.

⁴⁸H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, p. 20.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 65.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 93.

⁵¹H. Richard Niebuhr, op. cit., p. 42ff.

⁵²H. Richard Niebuhr, op. cit., p. 42ff.

⁵³Ibid., p. 44.

Niebuhr insists that once the revelatory illumination occurs, the theologian, or any believing and thinking Christian, is furnished a light by means of which the whole of world history may be understood and written as one single epic.⁵³

iv. The Essence of Revelation

The last chapter of Niebuhr's The Meaning of Revelation is an attempt to describe the "what" of the revelatory experience. This is not the only place at which he broaches this subject. It is discussed in the early articles in which his theory of revelation begins to take shape,⁵⁴ "The Nature and Existence of God,"⁵⁵ Christ and Culture,⁵⁶ and Radical Monotheism.⁵⁷ In all of these places, however, the presentation is both obscure and unconvincing. His discussions tend to intellectualize the revelational event, perhaps

as a result of that mistrust of mysticism which seems so universal in Protestantism and especially in American Protestantism. Niebuhr seems more eager, in this sense, to declare what revelation is not than to expound what it is. It is not, he says, "mystic visions or ecstatic experiences;"⁵⁸ it is not "the stimulation of innumerable

⁵³H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, pp. 110, 112. It would be interesting to discuss in an essay the significance of this insight from Niebuhr for the debate on the relationship between Weltgeschichte and Heilsgeschichte. There is clearly a relationship between Niebuhr's categories of inner and outer history and the more generally held distinction between Heilsgeschichte and Weltgeschichte, with inner history corresponding to the former and outer to the latter. The two categories are then related by Niebuhr's suggestion that the revelation, received in inner history, becomes a hermeneutic device used to interpret history generally. Willem F. Zuurdeeg in

⁵⁴Note 32, p. 137.

⁵⁵Motive, iv, p. 45.

⁵⁶Niebuhr, op. cit., pp. 254-5.

⁵⁷Niebuhr, op. cit., p. 44ff.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 44.

feelings."⁵⁹ It is something that happens to us, compelling us to believe in God;⁶⁰ it is the entry into our lives of "the great surd;" it is an existential experience, mediated by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, which convinces us that the power we call "fate" and "chance" is "faithful, utterly trustworthy, utterly loyal to all that issues from it."⁶¹ It is the "self-revelation of God" in which God "forces us to trust him."⁶² Revelation is the event in which God, through Jesus, makes himself known to us both as the "I" and the "am" of Exodus 3:14,⁶³ i.e., both as Being Itself and as Person. In the revelation event he touches us, indeed seizes us, convincing us that the fidelity (trust-loyalty) structure opens to all forms of faith. One Beyond the Many Who is Being Itself is an "I," that He is faithful as only selves can be faithful.⁶⁴ Here, once more,

⁵⁹ Here Niebuhr relies on Kittle's Theologisches Woerterbuch zum Neuen Testament.

⁶⁰ H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, p. 139.

⁶¹ H. Richard Niebuhr, Christianity and Crisis, p. 254.

⁶² H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation, p. 152. Here Niebuhr quotes Wilhelm Herrmann's Der Begriff der Offenbarung. All these words are strongly emotional words. Yet Niebuhr denies that the experience of revelation is an intensely emotional experience. This apparent contradiction renders his thought at this point somewhat opaque and obscure and leaves one with the typical positivistic question, "What does he mean?"

⁶³ This is a favorite passage of Niebuhr's, who relies on Etienne Gilson's interpretation to which he, however, adds an existential dimension by emphasizing the "I." Reference to it occurs in "Life Is Worth Living," p. 22; "What Then Must Man Do?", p. 147; and Radical Monotheism, p. 42ff. This passage is also the focus of a controversy between Niebuhr and Professor Willem F. Zuurdeeg in Theology Today, XVII, p. 362.

⁶⁴ Frei contributes one of his most lucid insights at this point, pointing out the relationship between Tillich, Barth, and Niebuhr. Niebuhr stands between the two men, emphasizing with Tillich that God is Being, with Barth that God is Person, but

mystical language seems called for and almost demanded, if the revelation event is to support the weight of the theological structure which Niebuhr builds on it. Niebuhr, however, will not admit it into his theological vocabulary. Therefore, his definition of revelation ends rather inadequately here. ⁶⁴ this way:

3. Radical Monotheism

The consequence of revelation is the conversion and the awakening in him who experiences the revelation of a new form of faith, radical monotheism. Radical monotheism is "a form of human faith"⁶⁵ and as such shares in the confidence-fidelity (trust-loyalty) structure common to all forms of faith, but it is distinguished from polytheistic and henotheistic forms by the object to which it attaches itself. ⁶⁵ Radical monotheism refuses to attach itself in trust and loyalty to any finite value center. Its value center is simply "the principle of being itself."⁶⁶ It is to this principle and to the realm of Being Itself that radical theistic faith believes both in the trustworthiness of Being and the value of Being as such. It believes that "whatever is,

⁶⁷ Ibid. This identity of Being with Value is very is good, because it exists as one thing among the many, which with more obscurity is a necessary, being-Value. "In it (Radical Monotheism) the principle of Being is identified with being unwilling, with Barth, to speak of God as "this particular Person who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." On the other hand, he is unwilling to accept Tillich's position that to speak of God as Person is purely symbolic. Paul Ramsey, Faith and Ethics, p. 103. ⁶⁸ This influenced his work at this point. Cf., Radical Monotheism, p. 105, note 1.

⁶⁵ H. Richard Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism, p.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 37.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 32.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 44.

⁷⁰ This is the point at which the existential influences discussed in Chapter V are to be seen in Niebuhr's mature work.

all have their origin and their being in...the principle of Being which is also the principle of Value."⁶⁷ Radical monotheism is iconoclastic, revealing the bankruptcy of all the little and minimal gods of societies and nations. Summing up his discussion on radical monotheism, Niebuhr puts it this way: "The one who is the principle of Being is not such an absolute

statement as Radical monotheism dethrones all absolutes short of the principle of Being itself. At the same time itism of Barth's reverences every relative existent. Its two great mottoes are: 'I am the Lord thy God; thou shalt have no other gods before me,' and 'Whatever development is, is good.'⁶⁸

One other quality of the object of radical monotheistic faith must be discussed, however, before the exposition of this faith-form is complete. As suggested in the section on

revelation, Niebuhr insists on the personal nature of faith's object. Correcting Gildon's interpretation of Exodus 3:14, comment."

Niebuhr says, "In the statement in Exodus to which we have previously referred,...the word 'I' is as startling as the word 'am.'⁶⁹ To emphasize his point, Niebuhr uses such terms for God as "steadfast self" and "First Person."⁷⁰

⁶⁷Ibid. This identity of Being with Value is very important in any understanding of Niebuhr. He seems to be saying with more obscurity than necessary, Being=Value. "In it (Radical Monotheism) the principle of Being is identified with the principle of Value and the principle of Value with the principal of Being." Radical Monotheism, p. 35. A further exposition of this aspect of Niebuhr's thought would require considerable study of the works of Jonathan Edward, who apparently influenced him much at this point. Cf., Radical Monotheism, p. 105, note 1.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 37.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 44.

⁷⁰This is the point at which the existential influences discussed in Chapter V are to be seen in Niebuhr's mature work.

Here again, however, as in the case of the discussion on revelation and for the same reason, the presentation becomes somewhat obscure, redundant, and unconvincing. Niebuhr hesitates to affirm with absolute resolution the "I'ness" of God.⁷¹ To judge from certain remarks in Radical Monotheism, it is likely Tillich who is "frightening" him away from such an absolute statement concerning God's personhood, although Niebuhr was repelled, on the other hand, also by the dogmatism of Barth's later works.⁷¹ This hesitancy is unfortunate because it creates a roadblock which prevents the natural and logical development of Niebuhr's thought. Because of his attempts to avoid this roadblock, obscurities and distortions are introduced into his understanding of revelation and God.⁷²

⁷¹Ibid., p. 44. "Of course, such an avowal (of God as person) raises a host of problems about tendencies toward anthropomorphism in our understanding of our ultimate environment." Its long history is traced by James Hastings and Paul Ramsey's

⁷²No specific section on Niebuhr's Christology has been included in this paper. Niebuhr's Christology would have to be treated in the section on revelation and is touched upon there. Niebuhr does not consider Christ the object of faith but one through whom the true object of faith reveals himself. Christ is then nothing more than Revealer, an insight that brings Niebuhr close to Baltmann. Cf. The Meaning of Revelation, p. 148ff, esp. pp. 151-2; Paul Ramsey, Faith and Ethics, p. 104ff. Frei, however, in his presentation, seems to go quite far from Niebuhr's meaning. Using Niebuhr's designation of Jesus as "Son of God" as a clue to Niebuhr's Christology, Frei interprets the phrase in a much more orthodox fashion than Niebuhr's writings would appear to justify. For the same reason I have avoided any discussion of Niebuhr's Trinitarianism. Frei's presentation in Faith and Ethics is illuminating. I agree with his evaluation of Niebuhr's Trinitarianism as "economic Trinitarianism." Ramsey, Faith and Ethics, p. 98. This understanding is confirmed by E. Clinton Gardner's presentation on page 101 of his book, E. Clinton Gardner, Biblical Faith and Social Ethics, (1960). As such, it has little--and can have little--to do historically or

⁷³Frei, The Self, p. 42.

C. Niebuhr's Mature Ethical System

1. Introduction

In his contribution to the Niebuhrian Festschrift,

James F. Gustafson wrote, "Until his (Niebuhr's) theological

ethics are systematically reduced by him to print and paper,

no one can adequately or accurately deal with Niebuhr's

ethics and its implications."⁷³ Because of his untimely

and sudden death, Niebuhr's ethics have still not been systematically "reduced to print and paper," and perhaps

never will be. This makes the work of a commentator extremely difficult. Nevertheless, some sort of tentative effort must

be made, since Niebuhr considered himself above all an ethicist⁷⁴ or, as he put it in The Responsible Self, "a

Christian moral philosopher."⁷⁵ The most helpful materials

for this presentation are Niebuhr's The Responsible Self, with its long introduction by James Gustafson, and Paul Ramsey's

Faith and Ethics. Considering the intricacies of ethical

theologically with the Trinitarian dogma of Nicea-Constantinople, which was basically an ontological-metaphysical argument concerning God's Being. Niebuhr, as Frei implies, rejects all ontological arguments concerning God. Paul Ramsey, Faith and Ethics, p. 103. Niebuhr's doctrine of the Trinity is an effort to put together, jigsaw puzzle fashion, various concepts which must be included in any understanding of God which is to deal realistically with life as we experience it. For further confirmation of this interpretation of Niebuhr's Trinitarianism, see Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, pp. 28-9. A Survey of Christian

⁷³Paul Ramsey, Faith and Ethics, p. 120. "Joseph Fletcher, Situation Ethics, p. 120. confirms de Long's opinion, though not his conclusion."

⁷⁴Niebuhr was professor of theology and ethics at Yale University from 1937 to his death in 1962. Ramsey, Faith and Ethics, p. x.

⁷⁵H. Richard Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, p. 42.

categorization, the unsystematic nature of the materials available and the creative personal way in which Niebuhr dealt with ethics, it is impossible to deal with Niebuhr as an ethicist in terms of categories. The presentation must rather be thematic.⁷⁶

2. The Philosophical Prolegomena

In the prologue to his Robertson lectures which he delivered in Glasgow, Scotland in 1960, H. Richard Niebuhr wrote, "The following...lectures have been given the subtitle 'An Essay on Christian Moral Philosophy.'⁷⁷ Further on in the body of the lectures, Niebuhr refers to these lectures as "prolegomena to Christian ethics,"⁷⁸ indicating that his desire in these lectures is to function as a philosopher of the Christian moral life, rather than as a moral theologian. The result of this philosophizing is a body of material similar to that which he offered in class under the title of "The Structure and Dynamics of the Moral Life."⁷⁹ A certain amount of the thought contained in this material should be acceptable to non-believers, as well as believers, being a generalized "phenomenological analysis of man's behavior."

⁷⁶Perhaps the safest categorization is the one which Edward de Long ventures in his book on Christian ethics. He lists Niebuhr among the "relationists," saying, indeed, that Niebuhr "developed what may be the most reflective and extensive theoretical conception" of the relational motive." Edward de Long, Jr., A Survey of Christian Ethics, (1967), p. 118. Joseph Fletcher confirms de Long's opinion, though he substitutes "situationist" for "relationist." Joseph Fletcher, Situation Ethics, (1966), pp. 34, 151.

⁷⁷H. Richard Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, p. 42. many ethicists use the term "responsible self," p. 56.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 86.

⁷⁹Ibid., pp. 6, 7.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 42. The influence of existentialism and social psychology is clearly obvious here. Cf. pp. 78-80.

moral existence."⁸⁰

The result of this analysis can be described as a social existentialism similar to that called for by Niebuhr ten years earlier in Christ and Culture.⁸¹ Man is seen as a personal Being, a Self, who stands in the context of a community of other selves. So constituted and so placed, man is called upon to become an active agent. The question is, On the basis of what principle and employing what image shall he commit himself to action and what form shall this action take? Many earlier moral philosophers have answered this in terms of a deontological or teleological ethic. The former ethic supplies man with the concepts of duty and obedience, the latter with the image of the end. In deontology man imagines himself as law-keeper and law-giver. In teleology, he sees himself as builder.⁸² Although not denying the validity of the images which these long traditions employ, Niebuhr suggests a new image of "responsibility" and a cathekontic ethic or an ethic of the "fitting" based upon this image.⁸³ The advantage of this new ethical image and system is that it takes both the personal and the communal aspect of human reality more seriously, assigning to them much more substantial influence in an understanding of human moral behavior.⁸⁴ Human existence is seen as a part of a triadic structure consisting of self, other, and cause. Within this

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 8.

⁸¹H. Richard Niebuhr, op. cit., p. 242ff.

⁸²Niebuhr uses the word "teleological" in the way many ethicists use the word "analogical." Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, p. 56.

⁸³Ibid., pp. 56, 87.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 56. The influence of existentialism and social psychology discussed in Chapter IV is patently obvious here. Cf. pp. 76-80.

structure each being is involved in continuous dialogue with every other being. There arises therefore that which may be called a trialogue. Within this totality the "I" is called upon to respond or reply fittingly to the actions and word addressed to him by his triologue partners. This analysis Niebuhr holds to be valid for situations not a part of a specifically Christian context.

3. Theological Development

At this point Niebuhr moves from philosophy to theology. It is an attempt to answer two questions which moves the discourse from the realm of philosophy to that of theology. First, what is the proper underlying attitude which should characterize the responses of the self to his partners in his triologic community? Second, what are the dimensions of this triologic community?

In answer to the first question, Niebuhr employs the term "faith" and introduces many of the concepts discussed above in the section on radical monotheism.⁸⁵ By faith, he means the radical monotheistic form of faith as trust in and loyalty to the One beyond the Many as being "steadfast self, ... faithful in all his doings and just in all his ways..."⁸⁶

⁸⁵H. Richard Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, pp. 118-126.

⁸⁶H. Richard Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism, p. 47. Cf. also, The Responsible Self, pp. 125-6.

⁸⁷H. Richard Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, pp. 144-145.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 144.

⁸⁹Paul Kiersey, Journal of the American Academy of Religion, p. 98. Gardner, a student of Niebuhr's, expresses this in Chapter V of his book. E. Clinton Gardner, Social Ethics and Social Ethics, p. 10ff. On the basis of remarks in the preface of his book, I consider it acceptable to use Gardner's definition of these thoughts in the attempt to understand Niebuhr in this matter. See Gardner, op. cit., p. xiii.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 86.

With this basic attitude each self feels himself affirmed,⁸⁶ accepted, even loved, by the absolute and is thus freed⁸⁷ from fear and self-defensiveness. He is then able to respond to each of his triologue partners with the same accepting, loving, affirming attitude. He is able to say "yes" to them.⁸⁷

The second question and its answer are closely related to the first. Because the creative attitude underlying moral action is faith in the source and principle of Being,⁹² the dimensions of the triologic community are seen to be absolutely universal. This community is identical with the Realm of Being; the cause, the third partner in the communal triologue, is then God.⁸⁸ Every action upon the Self must be interpreted and every response by the Self decided upon within the context of this community. Every action, then, becomes a response to the action of the Other and God, the steadfast Saving Self, and takes place within the context of the total community of Being.

The last paragraph in Niebuhr's ethical system which is not discussed in his own writings but cursorily treated by Gustafson involves the ethical significance of that economic trinitarianism referred to by Frei.⁸⁹

Radical monotheism sees God as active in all the events of life.⁹⁰ These events, however, are not always of the

⁸⁷H. Richard Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, pp. 144-145.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 86f.

⁸⁹Paul Ramsey, Faith and Ethics, p. 98. Gardner, a student of Niebuhr's, expounds this theme in Chapter V of his book. E. Clinton Gardner, Biblical Faith and Social Ethics, p. 10ff. On the basis of remarks in the preface of his book, I consider it acceptable to use Gardner's exposition of these thoughts in the attempt to understand Niebuhr in this matter. See Gardner, op. cit., p. xiii.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 98.

same sort. They fall into three general categories: Those events in which God manifests himself as power, that is, as Creator; those events in which God manifests himself as his order, i.e. as Governor and Judge; those events in which God manifests himself as goodness and mercy, i.e. as Redeemer.⁹¹

A fitting response to God as Creator involves first of all an appreciative, affirmative disposition toward the created world.⁹² In this connection, Niebuhr was fond of quoting this Augustine's Confessions, "Whatever in any degree is, is good."⁹³ But ethical response does not end here. The world as creation of God is not merely accepted and affirmed. It is loved, and this love leads to an effort to understand. This effort is the basis of science. Scientific endeavor, then, is seen as fitting response to God as Creator.⁹⁴ The believer goes still further in his response to God the Creator by

⁹¹Ibid., p. 34.
cultivating the creation and caring for it. The entire area of technology and cybernetics would fall under this "cultivating" response to God as Creator. Finally, the climax of man's response subject to distorting tendencies at one point particularly, to God as Creator is his participation in a limited way in God's dynamically, defining "Order" or "Law" as immutable realities own creativity. Man fashions things as God the Creator fashions.⁹⁵ of such static thought, Niebuhr feared, would be reaction. This might be called the cultural response, the best example of us, and cultural life. Political developments in America have which would be the creative arts, and have shown that such ethical systems are not only easily distorted in this direction, but, indeed, often dangerous. The presidential campaign of 1958

⁹¹H. Richard Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, p. 27. d, by political realities, to conduct a "law and order" campaign. This has since

⁹²Ibid., p. 30. If in order form on the municipal level in New York, Minneapolis, and Los Angeles. Usually, "God" and "religion"
⁹³St. Augustine, The Confessions of St. Augustine, New York (1950) XIII, XXI, 46. Cf., also, H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture, p. 210.

⁹⁴H. Richard Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, p. 31.

⁹⁵Ibid.

God's action as Judge and Governor is experienced chiefly in terms of finite limitation and suffering. Niebuhr liked to use political analogies to demonstrate his point here. Marxism's arising and the existence of a Marxist power block, for example, he saw as a judgment of God upon so-called "Christian communities."⁹⁶ The proper response to this act of God, as to all of his judgments, is acceptance of the limitation which God puts upon us by the arising of this power, repentance for the evils of our culture and history which gave rise to the Marxist movement, and corrective action to abolish these evils. So, in every instance, the proper response to the actions of God as Judge is acceptance of limitations, repentances, and corrective action, and, in no sense, warlike activity which is rebellion against God.⁹⁷

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 34.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 36. Niebuhr saw the ethics of natural law and of the orders of creation as an inadequate attempt to recognize and respond to the actions of God as Judge and Governor. He felt that an ethical system built upon these principles was subject to distorting tendencies at one point particularly. Such systems frequently tended to think statically rather than dynamically, defining "Order" or "Law" as immutable realities rather than as historical, evolutionary realities. The result of such static thought, Niebuhr feared, would be reaction, "statis quoism," and oppression in political, economic, religious, and cultural life. Political developments in America have vindicated Niebuhr's position here and have shown that such ethical systems are not only easily distorted in this direction, but, indeed, often dangerous. The presidential campaign of 1968 is the best indication of this. All candidates were forced, by political realities, to conduct a "law and order" campaign. This has since repeated itself in cruder form on the municipal level in New York, Minneapolis, and Los Angeles. Usually, "God" and "religion" play an important part in such "Law and Order" campaigns.

response God acts also as Redeemer and demands an appropriate response from those upon whom He so acts. Redeemer means "freer" and the ethical response to God's redemptive action must be conceived in terms of freedom. Freedom in this Christian ethical sense means freedom from sin, law, and death. It also means freedom for service. This "service" is the specific form of Christian ethics as response to God the Redeemer.⁹⁸

It is at this point that a final concept in Niebuhr's ethical system must be briefly mentioned. Gustafson points out in his introduction to The Responsible Self that for Niebuhr the proper response to God's redeeming action is not an "ethics of redemption," but a redeeming ethic which qualifies all our existing relations, and affects a "transformation and transvaluation of all our actions."⁹⁹ Frei terms this transformation motif in Niebuhr's ethics "conversionism."¹⁰⁰ Likewise, Paul Ramsey speaks of the "conversionist motif" in Niebuhr's Christian ethic.¹⁰¹ By this is meant Niebuhr's conviction that God, continuously revealing himself as Redeemer and Saviour, converts hearts to him and renews faith. By virtue of this constant conversion, eyes are opened more and more to see God's actions in terms of love and mercy, i. e., in terms of redemption. Response then becomes more and more.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 38f.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 40.

¹⁰⁰Paul Ramsey, Faith and Ethics, p. 65.

¹⁰¹Ibid., pp. 142, 162.

response to God as Redeemer and an ethic based upon redemption takes ascendancy in Christian life over an ethic of creation

A. Recapitulation
or judgment. In this ethic, relationships and actions which

The attempt of this paper has been to show the formerly were primarily seen as sustaining or ordering theological development of H. Richard Niebuhr from his relationships are transformed into redeeming relations and earliest writings at the beginning of the 1930s to his actions.¹⁰² This is clearly the direction in which Niebuhr's

final mature works in the late 30s and early 50s. The ethic moved, assigning as it did a predominate role to the significance of such a study is to be found primarily redemptive character of God.

in the faithfulness with which Niebuhr's thought reflects

D. Conclusion Logical trends characterizing not merely two

but this exposition of Niebuhr's mature theological and ethical system has attempted to show two things. First, the points at which earlier influences, elaborated in Chapters III and IV above, affected Niebuhr's final synthesis; second, the consistency of Niebuhr's thought, particularly the way in which his ethics are a natural extension and development of his theology. This unity of thought is evident above all in the persistence of the motif of radical monotheism throughout Niebuhr's works, whether they be systematic or ethical. This great theme, along with its correlatives of faith and conversion, convince any serious student of Niebuhr of the wholeness of his thought. . . . that "The Christianity of the

Gospels contains the required ideal." Moreover, he

¹⁰²H. Richard Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, p. 40.

¹Abelstrom does not discuss the third stage in Niebuhr's development in his essay on "Theology in America" saying, "Further continuation of the story in the present essay would be unstrategic, however, because our perspective disappears." Nearly ten years have elapsed, however, since Abelstrom wrote this, which means we are now able to pursue developments up to 1960. Smith and Jamison, Religion in American Life, I, p. 316.

²H. Richard Niebuhr, Social Sources of Denominationalism, p. 278.

believed CHAPTER VI: RECAPITULATION AND CRITIQUE

A. Recapitulation

The attempt of this paper has been to show the theological development of H. Richard Niebuhr from his earliest writings at the beginning of the 1920s to his final mature works in the late 50s and early 60s. The significance of such a study is to be found primarily in the faithfulness with which Niebuhr's thought reflects general theological trends characterizing not merely two but three generations of American and, indeed, European theologians.¹

Beginning his work in the 1920s, Niebuhr took up the reform crusade of the Social Gospel movement where the earlier leaders had left off and carried it forward on the basis of a liberal theology. On this firm theological foundation, with its belief in the Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, and the inevitability of human progress, Niebuhr was able in The Social Sources of Denominationalism, the work with which his early period was climaxed, to take a firm, forceful, prophetic stand in both theology and ethics. He insisted, e.g., that "The Christianity of the Gospels contains the required ideal."² Moreover, he

¹Ahlstrom does not discuss the third stage in Niebuhr's development in his essay on "Theology in America" saying, "Further continuation of the story in the present essay would be unstrategic, however, because our perspective disappears." Nearly ten years have elapsed, however, since Ahlstrom wrote this, which means we are now able to pursue developments up to 1960. Smith and Jamison, Religion in American Life, I, p. 316.

²H. Richard Niebuhr, Social Sources of Denominationalism, p. 278.

believed at that time that a "new appeal to good will" would be effective in bringing about an incarnation of the ideal of Jesus in the life of the churches, an approach which he repudiated in 1937.³

In the thirties, under the impact of historical events and theological influences from Europe, Niebuhr began to doubt the validity of his previous interpretation of the Christian faith. In comparing Social Sources of Denominationalism in which he speaks quite undialectically of the "Father," the "Beloved Community," and "all the brethren"⁴ with The Kingdom of God in which he speaks of the "dialectical movement" necessary in theology if anything valid about the "infinite and eternal God" is going to be uttered by sinful members of a "fallen world,"⁵ it would appear indeed that by 1937 he doubted the validity of his earlier understanding of God. The result is a work more speculative theologically, less categorical and prophetic ethically. There are no great and noble appeals similar to the one with which Social Sources of Denominationalism closes, to "practice non-resistance and love of enemy," to abrogate "distinctions between rich and poor...by a kind of communion of love" or "to transcend and heal the divisions among men."⁶ In The Kingdom of God, instead, Niebuhr produced

³Niebuhr, The Kingdom of God in America, p. x: heavily philosophical interpretation of the Bible to dissolve its concrete

⁴Niebuhr, Social Sources of Denominationalism, p. 279.

⁵Ibid., p. xiv.

⁶Niebuhr, Social Sources of Denominationalism, pp. 280-81.

an interesting, scholarly, objective and detached study of American church history using as a hermeneutical key the theme of the Kingdom of God.⁷

Except for those works in which a strictly theological polemic is carried on,⁸ Niebuhr's works from this time on never regained the prophetic power of his earlier social gospel writings.⁹ Indeed, the speculative element becomes more and more ascendant in both the theological and ethical thought of the late Niebuhr. By 1960, all references to "God" in concrete terms, such as "Father" or "Shepherd" have disappeared in favor of abstract philosophical terms, such as "Being" or "The One beyond the Many."¹⁰ Similarly, all references to the "ideals of Christianity" or "the ethics of the gospel," freely employed in 1929, have been expunged from Niebuhr's

Niebuhr insists that this theme was not imposed on the material but discovered in the study itself. Niebuhr, The Kingdom of God in America, pp. xi-xii.

The most significant example here is Niebuhr, the Pauck, Miller, The Church Against the World.

The same prophetic stance found in Social Sources of Denominationalism is also found in the articles of the 1920s. Vide "The Alliance Between Labor and Religion," "Christianity and the Social Problem," "What Holds Churches Together?" "Christianity and the Industrial Classes," and "Churches That Might Unite."

Niebuhr's retention of the term "person" for God may be an attempt to retain some concrete symbol. However, the hesitancy with which he employs this term and his heavily philosophical interpretation of it tend to dissolve its concrete aspect.

ethics in favor of an appeal for loyalty and trust in the "One Beyond the Many" or the "Principle of Being." Thus, at the end of his life, Niebuhr preferred to call himself a "moral theologian,"¹¹ and to offer "phenomenological analyses of human moral behavior" for consideration rather than prophetic appeals for action.¹² Niebuhr began his life where Karl Marx ended it, with the desire to "change" the world and ended where Marx began, with a desire to "understand" it. Moreover, his personal development in this respect is illustrative of a development which was general to his generation in America. This paper will be concluded with an attempt to understand why Niebuhr developed in this direction during the 40s and 50s.

B. Critique

During the decade of the 20s, on the basis of the very definite convictions evident in The Social Sources of Denominationalism Niebuhr had been able to speak out specifically, boldly, concretely and significantly on the issues of the day. These convictions, however, were not able to resist the shaking of the foundations of the intellectual world which characterized the 30s. All sorts of historical and intellectual influences were at work

undermining Niebuhr's original faith, many of which are elaborated

Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, p. 754.

¹¹Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, p. 6.

¹²Ibid., p. 8.

¹³Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 8.

in earlier chapters of this work. The key figure, in¹⁷ on the terms of the dissipation of Niebuhr's liberal theologicals, on premises, however, must be Karl Barth, particularly the¹³ theology expounded in his Commentary on Romans. In Barth's case, however, the vacuum in his faith and life created by his rejection of liberal theology did not long remain unoccupied. Already in the 1920s, while working on Discal Christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf,¹⁴ Barth was developing not the doctrine of the Word of God which would form the Dogmatics prolegomena to his massive Church Dogmatics. By offering not this doctrine as the foundation of theology, Barth intended to reverse the "Copernican revolution" introduced into up theology by Protestant Scholasticism and canonized by Alison Schleiermacher.¹⁵ The Doctrine of the Word of God should the replace the idea of the "Christian Faith" as the object of dogmatics and a church dogmatics should replace the Glaubenlehren of the nineteenth century as an exposition of Christian belief.

¹⁷ Barth considers his dialogue with Anselm, which By 1932, the year in which Barth published the completely the most significant influence in the development of his thought from rewritten Christliche Dogmatik under the new title, Died, "Christian Century, LVI, Nos. 37, 38. Cf., Ramsey, Faith and Ethics, pp. 50-1.

Kirchliche Dogmatik,¹⁶ his teaching concerning the objective reality of the Word of God had been fortified and the objective-

subjective tension of the Roemerbrief had been overcome through (Barthianism) in its later forms. Niebuhr, "Reformation: Continuing Imperative," p. 248. "So many of them (the Barthians) seem to

¹³ Karl Barth, Der Roemerbrief, Munich (1921). Niebuhr declares this to be one of the ten books which influenced him most. Niebuhr, "Ex Libris," Christian Century, LXXIX, p. 754.

¹⁴ Karl Barth, Die Christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf, Munich (1927).

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 87. Cf., also Paul Ramsey, Faith and Ethics, p. 45.

¹⁶ Karl Barth, Die Kirchliche Dogmatik, Munich (1932).

a more orthodox understanding of the Incarnation.¹⁷ On the basis of the ground won through this development,--that is, on the basis of a breakthrough into faith which occurred only with much prayer,¹⁸ the theology of The Church Dogmatics became possible. Thus, Barth initiated a second phase of the revolution which he had begun in 1919.

It is this second phase of the Barthian theological revolution in which Niebuhr, along with many others, could not participate.¹⁹ Since the faith upon which The Church Dogmatics is based was simply not accessible to him, Niebuhr could not make sense of the massive volumes of dogmatics and so turned away from Barth's theological construction. Having grown up in the environment of theological-philosophical liberalism and American democracy and being already middle-aged when the revolution began to effect him, he found himself emotionally and intellectually unable to digest what he considered to be

¹⁷Barth considers his dialogue with Anselm, which culminated in his book Fides Quaerens Intellectum, to be the most significant influence in the development of his thought from 1927 to 1932. Vide Karl Barth, "How My Mind Has Changed," Christian Century, LVI, Nos. 37, 38. Cf., Ramsey, Faith and Ethics, pp. 50-1.

¹⁸Cf., Barth, Fides Quaerens Intellectum, Munich (1931), Preface.

¹⁹"In the 1950s I had turned against that movement (Barthianism) in its later forms." Niebuhr, "Reformation: Continuing Imperative," p. 248. "So many of them (the Barthians) seem to me to have gone back to orthodoxy as right teaching, right doctrine, and to faith as fides, as assent." Ibid., p. 250.

the oppressive authoritarianism of Barth's late theology. His mind revolted at the thought of a "bondage" to the dogma. He must be free to explore everywhere and anywhere he chose. The result was a return to the liberal-democratic free-thought syndrome of his youth. This return manifested itself in the increasingly abstract and speculative direction taken by his thought.

The increasing importance of these two characteristics, so typical of bourgeois liberalism, indicates that Niebuhr's late theology, along with that of similarly minded contemporaries, may be seen as a last stage of bourgeois theology. Important developments since 1960 indicate that theology is beginning to pass beyond this stage as, at the time of the Reformation and Renaissance, it turned away from the medieval-feudal thought world. Just as Calvinistic theology and Christianity adapted itself to a capitalistic bourgeoisie society and, according to some scholars, indeed, contributed significantly to the emergence of that

society,²⁰ so the contemporary theological explication of toward the famous "opening to the left" is seen as his audience and Christianity seems to be turning increasingly towards the emergingness toward dialogue with the socialist leaders, which led socialistic society of the future for its thought forms. In the relationship to the Church, the beginning of a past ten years that dialogue between Christians and communists, examples of Catholicism's dialogue with socialism are Vatican II's which had for sometime gone on at the unofficial level in Spain, sections 8 and 9, and Pope Paul VI's latest encyclical on the social encyclical of Pope

²⁰Cf., the classic formulation of this theory in Max Weber, *Das Protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*, (1903).

²¹Perhaps that will happen in the future to and learn from socialists and communists is the ground for the popular association of "communist sympathizers" often leveled against the National Council of Churches in the USA and the World Council of Churches.

²³E.g., *Die Internationale Theologische Zeitschrift* and *Concurrence*.

²⁴Roger Galtsoff, *From Apology to Dialogue*, New York (1968).

France, England, and Greece, has received considerable sanction on the Catholic side.²¹ In addition to these official contacts between Catholicism and communism, Catholic theologians like Karl Rahner and Johannes Metz, as well as the great Jesuit paleontologist and priest, Teilhard de Chardin, have provided philosophical and theological points of contact. This movement toward socialism is also evident in the Protestantism in the works of Jurgen Moltmann, Helmut Gollwitzer, Harvey Cox, and Paul Oestreicher.²² Several periodicals have recently been founded with the primary purpose in mind of furthering the dialogue between socialism and communism on the one hand and Christianity on the other.²³ On the Marxist side there has also been some interest and response. The figure most often pointed to here is Roger Garaudy, author of From Anathema to Dialogue,²⁴ and frequent

²¹This sanction has taken both a political and a theological form. Pope John XXIII's role in leading Italian politics toward the famous "opening to the left," as well as his audience and dialogue with Alexis Adzhubi, Khrushchev's son-in-law, and his openness toward dialogue with Italian communist leaders, which led Italian communist ideologists to begin a re-evaluation of communism's relationship to the church, are examples of a beginning of a political rapprochement. Perhaps the most significant theological examples of Catholicism's turning toward socialism are Vatican II's schema on "The Church in the Modern World," particularly Chapter I, sections 8 and 9, and the Conclusion, section 2; Pope Paul VI's latest encyclical de Populorum Progressio and the social encyclical of Pope John XXIII, Mater et Magistra.

²²Perhaps this willingness to talk to and learn from socialists and communists is the ground for the popular accusation of "communist sympathizers" often leveled against the National Council of Churches in the USA and the World Council of Churches.

²³E.g., Die Internationale Dialogische Zeitschrift and Concurrence.

²⁴Roger Garaudy, From Anathema to Dialogue, New York (1966).

lecturer at Christian conferences. Other communist philosophers also have shown an interest in the emerging dialogue. Among these are Milan Machovec, professor of philosophy at the ~~University of Prague~~ University of Prague, and Elena Marculescu, a young philosopher teaching in the Philosophical Institute of the University of Bucharest in Rumania.²⁵ It would appear, then, that there is a strong and growing movement leading theology away from the bourgeois-capitalistic world altogether and away from the thought forms conditioned by that world. Niebuhr's theology operates conceptually well within the old categories conditioned which enabled Christianity to begin ridding itself of the vestiges by capitalistic bourgeois democracy and, as such, his theology is interesting but probably will not play a decisive role in the turns out to be more conservative than Barth. theology of the new world of the future. Basically conservative and speculative, and excessively cautious in nature, this type of theology is not well suited to a revolutionary age. It lacks the boldness to create a new reality.²⁶ Strangely enough, and yet not strange at all, the spirit of the new "theology of the left" is much more closely akin to the spirit of Barthian theology

²⁵Articles by all these people can be found in Paul Oestreicher's book The Christian Marxist Dialogue. Paul Oestreicher, The Christian Marxist Dialogue, London (1969) p. 115ff; 137ff; 204ff.

²⁶The conservatism, and particularly the caution, of Niebuhr's theology is, as is so often the case, even more evident in his disciples. Cf., James F. Gustafson's Treasure in Earthen Vessels or the whole tone of the writings in the Niebuhrian Festschrift, Faith and Ethics.

than to that of the theology represented by Niebuhr and his contemporary disciples.²⁷ Lacking the Barthian parasia, this theology appears to be dissipating itself in academic irrelevance and impotency. Beyond providing us with a few significant but scattered insights of enduring value, it is doubtful if it will play formative role in the society or the theology of the future.

²⁷A number of the Marxist contributors to Oestreicher's book refer most positively to Barth's work. Cf., Machovec's comment on pp. 117-8. In the same book, Roger Garaudy attributes to Barth the beginning of a break in the Christian tradition which enabled Christianity to begin ridding itself of the vestiges of Platonic dualism. Op. cit., p. 153. Likewise, Eox and Moltmann, two important voices of the "new theology," appear more closely akin to Barth than to the Niebuhr liberalism which turns out to be more conservative than Barth.

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Jerry F o l k

Lebenslauf und Bildungsgang

Als Sohn des Kaufmanns Harold R. Folk und seiner Frau Olive geb. Stoker wurde ich am 3. Juli 1937 in St. Marys/Ohio geboren.

Nach dem Besuch der Volksschule in St. Marys/Ohio 1943-1951 und der Memorial High School in St. Marys/Ohio 1951-1955 legte ich im Mai 1955 die Reifeprüfung ab.

Im September 1955 immatrikulierte ich mich an der Capital University Columbus/Ohio an der biologischen Fakultät.

Von September 1955 - Mai 1959 war ich Student an der Capital - University Columbus an der naturwissenschaftlichen Fakultät.

Im Mai 1959 vollendete ich mein Studium an der Universität und machte mein Examen in Naturwissenschaft und bekam den Grad B.A. (Bachelor of Arts).

Von September 1959-Mai 1960 studierte ich am Evangelical Lutheran Theological Seminary Columbus/Ohio.

Von Juli 1960-Mai 1961 wurde ich als Vikar an der Calvary Lutheran Church in Los Angeles, California eingesetzt.

Von September 1961-Mai 1963 studierte ich am Wartburg Theological Seminary Dubuque, Iowa und machte dort mein Examen und erhielt den Grad B.D. (Bachelor of Divinity).

Anschließend (Oktober 1963-Juni 1964) wurde ich als Student an der Oxford University, Oxford, England, eingeschrieben.

Von November 1964-Juli 1966 studierte ich an der Evangelisch-theologischen Fakultät der Universität Tübingen.

Seit 1967 bin ich Pfarrer an der St. John's Lutheran Church in Steubenville/Ohio. Nach der voraussichtlichen Beendigung meines Rigorosums im August dieses Jahres werde ich in meine Gemeinde nach Steubenville zurückkehren.